

Psycho-Educational Challenges Faced by Dalit Women in P. Sivakami's Novels: The Grip of Change and The Taming of Women

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Abstract: Dalit women who are placed at the lowest strata in society, face discrimination in all forms of their personal life, educational life, psychological life, and social life in India. P. Sivakami in her literary works highlights exploitation, suffering, lack of employment, and psycho-educational and social problems faced by Dalit women at various levels. Education is the weapon and the tool for the marginalised community including Dalits not only in India but also in Tamil Nadu. This research paper analyses the various educational challenges faced by Dalit women in P. Sivakami's novels: *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*. These novels contain themes narrating the illiteracy of Dalit women, gender bias in education, degradation, lack of motivation, anxiety, sexual abuse, depression, violence and atrocities, educational scholarships, and the social stigma on Dalit women. Even educated Dalit women still in the 21st century face issues in every sphere of life. Hence, the researcher is using the review of literature as the source of data to explore the psycho-educational challenges of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. This study is based on the descriptive, qualitative, and deductive approaches to justify the various objectives. The paper highlights the urgent need for education, required interventions, and proper implementation of welfare schemes for the development of Dalit women and their communities. It also demands responsibilities from all citizens, educational institutions, and governments for their well-being.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Education, P. Sivakami, Caste, Psychological Issues

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I. INTRODUCTION

According to the psychology dictionary, psycho-educational challenges are defined as the challenges faced by the youth in their educational process that cause vital emotional or psychological problems. These educational issues affect an individual's mind, body, and behaviours. Dalit girl children in educational institutions face discrimination based on their caste. They are excluded from their peer groups, humiliated by people around them, physically abused, mentally tortured, and psychologically discouraged. Dalit girl children need to deal with challenges in accessing their fundamental right to education provided by the constitution.

Education provides a totality of development for an individual. It encourages everyone to develop their mental, psychological, emotional, and spiritual abilities and transform them to be a better social being. The role of education in empowering an individual is a universally accepted fact. P. Sivakami one of the leading Dalit novelists, speaks of the importance of education for all Dalit women. Sivakami expresses her feelings that the concept of education for Dalit women is yet to take root in society. People around her still lack the knowledge of the significance of education. P. Sivakami pointed out the fact that most atrocities in the country are done against Dalit women. She says how the Dalit feminists who raise their voices for the women belonging to the same community are categorized or branded in society as separatists. They are considered separatists for the reason they speak for

the large number of people who have been affected by discrimination. She feels that Dalit feminists need more encouragement to come out from their shells. Her novels portray gender bias in education even by the parents. They prevent their girl children from higher education after attaining puberty and soon the girl children are sent into marriage.

P. Sivakami uses her novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* to present various issues faced by Dalit girl children in their higher education. She reveals the educational status of these children in these novels. They faced a lot of challenges and obstacles to attain basic education. They faced opposition from their family and their community. This paper highlights the manifold struggles Dalit women underwent to attain their education.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives are based on the literary works of P. Sivakami.

- To highlight the challenges faced by the Dalit women for education.
- To understand the psycho-social problems of Dalit women.
- To suggest ways and means to promote education among Dalit girls and women.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges faced by the Dalit women for their education?
- What is the educational status of Dalit women at present?

- What the means to encourage education among the Dalit women in Tamil Nadu?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied for this paper is descriptive and thematic in nature. The researcher has used the primary and secondary data. The primary data are the original novels and the secondary data are the related published articles and journals, etc.

V. SHARE INITIATIVE

Madhuri Hooda (2014) points out the need for the general well-being of a student in the context of their gender and residential background. According to her, a child can only be well educated when they enjoy physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Misra (1990) found that the most exploited and deprived community in India is the Dalit community for their suffering is made visible by their utter poverty, low economic status, social deprivations, and education. Asthana (2005) shares a similar point in her writing about how Dalit students hailing from poor socio-economic backgrounds feel alienated and excluded from society. The report on Dalits Gatade (2007) reveals how Dalit students are being discriminated against in their higher educational institutions and their professional areas. They are discriminated against because of their caste, and poor economic status. According to Sharma. S (2002), discriminated students who belong to poor families experience higher anxiety that disturbs their physical, mental, and psychological health. These students undergo acute worry, tension, high blood pressure, and ill health which is reflected in their failure rather than success. Shailaja (2009) opens up the journey of Dalit girls to gain education demands to conquer many social and cultural obstacles.

VI. DALIT WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN - THE GRIP OF CHANGE

P. Sivakami presents the young Dalit girls witnessing a tremendous change in their earlier days which may create in them the feeling of hatred towards their own life. They will turn out to be the sole responsible person for the daily chores at home and nurturing their children. The attitude of the villagers towards sexual violation, physical torture, mental trauma, and psychological disturbance of Dalit women is something natural and spontaneous. Thus society proves that Dalit women are the oppressed of the oppressed and slaves of the slaves. They have no voice in society and no one raises their voice for them.

Caste and Gender Bias

Dalit women are deprived of predictable requisites of life such as liberty, justice, education, protection, fundamental rights, and freedom. Sivakami in her novels moans how even the modern and educated Dalit women continue to be the victims of caste in this era. She proves that caste oppression and women's oppression always go hand in hand.

Dalit women however are educated; they are not completely released from the clutches of their cruel oppressors. Girls are considered inferior and given less importance in the family and society. Sometimes their interest and dreams go unnoticed even by their parents. Most of the parents do not encourage them to fly high. When these young girls grow in age they are sexually molested by upper caste men. Dalit men enjoy the freedom of falling in love with girls belonging to other castes which cannot even be thought for the Dalit women.

Gowri, the daughter of Kathamuthu is the mouth-spoken person of Sivakami in the novel 'The Grip of Change'. She is the only girl who has stepped into the doors of the school and college from her village. Her identity in the novel is connected with her education. She was thrilled with happiness on the day she went to college. Gowri considered education higher than any other thing. She felt she could overcome the human-made boundaries.

"During floods, waters from overflowing wells mingle with the waters of huge water bodies, transgressing their boundaries Gowri felt that she had crossed over human-made boundaries. Her father, her caste, and her village merged with the ocean of people. But when the rain stops, the floods recede and thorn bushes emerge. Whenever she went back home for holidays, caste revealed its murderous teeth like an invincible monster." (The Grip of Change - 95).

Domestic Challenges and Humiliation for Education

Gowri faced objections from her father, her caste, and her village for seeking higher education. Nothing prevented her from pursuing her hopes, dreams, and ambitions. The people who do not know the value of education used to criticize Gowri and her education. Her stepmother keeps complaining about Gowri that she doesn't obey her because of her education. Sometimes, her happiness lasted only for a few moments. She faced criticism from all the corners.

Gowri was often discouraged by her father for going to school. Her father used to wake her up along with her siblings early in the morning to go to the field for work. Gowri hated being seen with a bundle of hay on her head by her classmates or any of her friends. Her father scolded her for her attitude of shame towards the work. Even though, she enjoyed a bond of love between her and her father in her childhood days. Her family atmosphere changed when her father started to share his love and care with other women and their children. She felt neglected by her father and gradually she was withdrawing to herself.

Social Discrimination in the School

P. Sivakmai narrates the way caste prowls around like an invisible monster in different sectors of life. The

Dalit girls are being humiliated in the colleges and other educational institutions. Gowri, feels ashamed to go and receive the scholarship money given to the Dalits in front of other students. She felt degradation while others observed her and other Dalit women as something lower.

“Gowri, like many other students, felt ashamed to collect the scholarship application form for scheduled caste students from the administrative office of the college. When an announcement was made in class that the scholarship money had arrived and that SC students should sign and collect at the administrative office, she left the classroom with a few other students, their bodies shrinking in humiliation.” (The Grip of Change - 110)

Dalit children are often socially restricted in educational institutions. Gowri was disturbed by an event in which she was wounded by the remarks of a student belonging to a backward caste. Gowri asked the student who was returning after getting her scholarship money: ‘How much did you get?’ ‘For you, it is different’, the girl replied. ‘Aren’t you from a Scheduled Caste?’ Gowri enquired doubtfully. ‘Nonsense! I am a Vanniyakula Kshatriya’. ‘If you are not from a Scheduled caste, just say no! Why do you have to prefix ‘nonsense’? (The Grip of Change - 95) Due to this degradation, the novel presents some lower caste youngsters who started to follow the upper caste traditions to cover up their identity. Their purpose was to cover up their inferior identity so that they would be respected in society.

“Some Vanniyars had begun to wear sacred thread like Brahmins. They had attempted to intimidate the lower castes with their upper-caste status. However, their tactics had not worked, for the food they ate and the clothes they wore were similar to those of the lower castes. They were unable to intimidate with money. The gathering at Nallasivam’s house spoke passionately about lower castes grabbing opportunities rightfully due to the Vanniyars.” (The Grip of Change - 138)

P. Sivakami through her novel reveals the mind of the people and their narrow attitude towards Dalit women. Dalit women’s experience of the world is so limited since they are not permitted to go out of their city. Gowri, being an educated person has seen life outside of their village, goes out of their thinking, and rejects the social standards, values and age-old patriarchal lifestyle. She adopted the modern lifestyle and Kathamuthu criticizes her, “you go to school in full makeup like a movie-extra, a cartload of that black stuff on your eyes ashamed of carrying a sack of rice on her head.” (The Grip of Change - 9).

Physical and Mental Torture

Gowri was so happy to receive high marks from her school. She was excited to show her report card to her father with a high mark, but her brother splashed water on it which made her angry and she slapped him. Seeing this her father slapped her so hard that the food in her mouth went flying. She felt humiliated and accumulated a sort of revenge feeling towards them. She blamed her father for not providing her college fees but spending money on his drinks. Finally, he provided money saying that he did not want to fail in his duty. But he spoke well about her in front of the people that there is no one to beat his daughter with her brilliance. He did not like Gowri as being fashionable and modern.

Sivakami highlights the fact that education doesn’t prevent Dalit women from being oppressed by the men in society. However, within the community, the power still rests upon the men. Kathamuthu was pressuring Gowri to get married and Gowri was arguing with her reason for not getting married. Women remaining at home without getting married is an unimaginable thing in society. The condition of Dalit women has not changed even after getting an education. Dalit women like any other women possess an innate wisdom born out of their practical experiences of life. Even then, they are treated as inferior to men. They are expected to be more gentle, and meek. Dependent, submissive, and passive in nature.

Educational Empowerment

The novel postulates the crude stereotype mentality of the patriarchal society about educating Dalit women. Gowri stands as a ray of hope among the Dalit women of her time. However, Kathamuthu allowed Gowri to get an education which made her strong and confident with her convictions. Her education made her aware of the fact and realize how society exploits the Dalits in particular Dalit women. She was courageous enough to protest against the early marriage arranged for her. She did not want to repeat the same suffering her mother underwent in her marital life and said, “The sufferings that my mother underwent in her marriage! I don’t want to be tortured like her by some man.” (Ibid-124) Gowri prepared herself for the examination secured a good result and pursued her education outside of her village. Thus, she made a difference in her life.

Education has transformed the lives of all the women across the country and the lives of Dalit women too. The educated Dalit woman Gowri, got the courage to question the fundamentals of the casteism practised in its severe form. The education acquired by Gowri transformed her from a scared village girl to a daring, self-confident, and independent teacher, who even confronted her father’s mistakes. She tried to empower her stepmothers namely Nagamani and Thangam.

VII. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF DALIT WOMEN - THE TAMING OF WOMEN

The women in the novel 'The Taming of Women' were deprived of education. Periyannan was not happy to send his daughters to school. Kala his daughter, was a diligent reader was forcefully taken back from school and sent to marriage even before she turned fifteen. Arul, who is an intelligent and highly imaginative girl had her own independent decision to remain unmarried and denounced motherhood. Sivakami uses her as her mouthpiece to fight against the oppression of women and the rigid practices of the patriarchy.

Periyannan was so calculative in sending his daughters to school. He did not want his daughters to be educated for he knew well that if they were educated they wouldn't be under him. knowing very well the power of education, he hesitated to provide it to his daughters. For, education will make them self-confident, and independent and speak for their rights. Therefore, he did not send any of his daughters to any academic study.

Kala was a very studious girl and a voracious reader of fiction, he completely prohibited her from continuing her studies. He blocked the accessibility of books to her. He would shout and scold her if she is found with any book. Kala collected books from Dingumalli, the brother of Mariayyi. He has a good collection of books and he was happy to provide it to Kala. "Let the book lovers read. It will not be washed away in a flood or burnt down to embers or reduced by sharing." (The Taming of Women - 34) He was sharing the importance of education and reading books.

When Periyannan came to know that Kala wanted to pursue her studies, he snatched the books out of her hands and beat her severely. Kala borrowed a book from her friends for reading and it happened to be noticed by her father. "He snatched the book out of her hands, looked at the obscene title and front cover, and banged it on her head repeatedly, yelling, 'The deer on a tiger hunt, eh? Tiger... deer.' Kala covered her head with her hands and took the beatings. Periyannan questioned her, "Where did she get this book from?" Again, he raises a question: "Who gave you the guts to go and beg a man for books, eh? Has your mother let you loose to roam on the streets?" (The Taming of Women - 36 & 37).

Patriarchal Attitude

It has been designed from remote ages that women need to be dependent on men for their financial needs and the men of the family handle the money. The women need to be dependent on their husbands for all their basic needs and so Anandhayi too depends on Periyannan. He used to insult and blame her for taking extra money from him which she did not commit. She remained silent during these constant abuses and insults since she needed to depend on him in the future. The living conditions of Dalit women are gradually changing. The women are trying their best to make their own identity in the society. The present

generation of women started to question the customs of society that don't appeal to the current era. Sivakami presents various women characters in the novel representing different attitudes of Dalit women. Some are like Anandhayi living a life submissive to their husbands. There are some like Lakshmi who long for comfort and security and later fall into a huge trap and are unable to escape from it and finally make a big full stop of their life. There are also some Dalit women motivated to live a single but happy and contented life like Poongavanam. She decided to remain a single mother and take care of her children. Dhanam was trying to go against the traditional customs imposed on her. Sivakami points out that there is a new independent generation coming up.

VIII. FINDINGS

The researcher has found the following positive and negative aspects presented in the novels by P. Sivakami.

- Dalit women face a lot of hindrances to attain basic education.
- They undergo gender discrimination, social stigma, and social isolation from their parents, family, and communities.
- They are prevented from going to school and college for higher education.
- Dalit girl children are physically tortured for going to school.
- They face a lot of mental and psychological pressure.
- They are not being appreciated for their achievements.
- Their going to school is questioned on the grounds of morality.
- Dalit girl children are socially isolated based on their caste.
- They feel depression, anxiety, and deprivation.
- They feel loneliness in the schools.
- They are being mocked, physically abused, and humiliated by their peer groups.
- Dalit women are empowered through education.
- They are made capable of deciding for themselves.
- They could convince society of their ideas and aspirations.
- They became aware of their rights and began to fight for fundamental rights.
- They started to raise their voice against the atrocities that they witnessed in their families and societies.
- They stand for justice, social equality, empowerment for Dalits, and demand for better implementation of schemes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dalit women who are educated can bring a tremendous change in their family, village, community, and society. Therefore, at any cost, the country needs to promote education among the Dalit girls. The country can attain development only through proper education of its citizens. Therefore, the researcher recommends

all citizens, NGOs, educational institutions, counselling centers, and state and central governments take this issue a bit seriously.

- All Indian citizens along with various associations and organizations are suggested to eradicate the patriarchal system to treat all sections of the society equally in matters of education and promote various provisions for their upliftment of both economic and social status.
- World Women Courts, Women and Justice Section of Supreme Court of India, Mahila Court in India, and other special courts and legal systems are suggested to prevent child marriages, extramarital affairs and exploitations, domestic violence and atrocities, and all forms of suppression and sufferings infused or forced on Dalit women and to take necessary measures and apply legal systems to punish the criminals.
- Women need to be encouraged to pursue their studies even after their marriage because marriage is not a profession.
- Women need to be equally valued in the job market.
- Married women should be allowed to work.
- The whole nation needs to fight for the empowerment of their women.
- The educated and liberated Dalit women and men need to encourage and set an example for others through their lives, writings, and other means to inspire and motivate them for better well-being.
- Journalists, social media experts, literary writers, and social activists, are encouraged to pursue Dalit issues, problems, and success stories, progress toward advancement, and promote pro-Dalit writers, and journalists and fight for their cause and interest.
- All social workers, educationalists, counsellors, and psychologists are recommended to help and facilitate their mental health, and social health. Use social work methods, counselling therapies, and other strategies to reduce their suffering, abuse, and violence and empower them with human dignity, self-confidence, and self-esteem and empower them with resilience capacity and scope and hope of survival approaches.
- Educational departments, as well as institutions, and various Dalit organizations, are recommended to give awareness to Dalit communities of the various government scholarships and schemes available for their liberation.
- The educational departments and governments are recommended to check the utilization of scholarships and to evaluate the implementation of welfare schemes and their outcome properly.
- It is suggested that more schemes and privileges be increased for the betterment of the marginalized communities in India.

CONCLUSION

Sivakami intensifies the naked truth of uneducated, powerless, and economically and socially backward

Dalit women in her novels. Education is the most powerful weapon to fight against social injustice done to Dalit women. Education can be one of the means to empower them, motivate and create their own identity, self-respect, and dignity. Though the government has helped the Dalits with so many welfare schemes, in the process of education and social upliftment even today the 21st century Dalits are undergoing exploitation, discrimination, and other forms of abuse. It is also noted Dalits have improved during the last decades constructively and positively in their growth in economic, educational social, cultural, and cognitive aspects of life. P. Sivakami is an IAS officer and educated Dalit woman who has conquered her personal, family, social, professional, and political life. She is the model, source of inspiration, and motivation for all the Dalit girls and women in their struggle towards their development and well-being. In the patriarchal and oppressive system education for the weaker section has proved as a powerful tool and instrument to fight for their human rights, combat all social evils, stand with the voiceless courageously, make brave decisions, and execute all their plans without fear and force independently and with full freedom of choices. Therefore, every citizen has to play a significant role in promoting education and mental health for backward communities without any compromise to uphold social justice, equality, and fraternity.

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