The Construction of Masculinity and the Perpetuation of Patriarchal Power in Sivakami's Anandhayi

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***Abstract*—This paper examines the complexities of male domination in Sivakami's literary works, with particular emphasis on her novel Anandhayi. Through a critical analysis of the text, the study explores how male characters exercise power, negotiate their social roles, and establish relationships with other characters. It seeks to investigate the ways in which masculinity and power are constructed, expressed, and challenged within the narrative. Furthermore, the paper aims to deepen the understanding of how literature reflects and shapes societal perceptions of male authority, gender relations, and power structures. By analysing the representation of male characters and the dynamics of domination in Sivakami's writing, this study contributes to broader academic discussions on masculinity, patriarchy, and power in both literary and social contexts.**

***Index Terms*—Masculinity, Power Dynamics, Male Domination, Patriarchy, Gender Roles**

I. Introduction

Periyannan, the husband of Aanandhayi, represents the deeply entrenched patriarchal mindset that privileges male authority and personal gratification over marital commitment and family responsibilities. His repeated involvement in extramarital relationships with women in the neighbourhood exposes his chauvinistic attitude and disregard for marital fidelity. One such relationship develops with Muthakka, a distant relative of Aanandhayi, who visits the family to assist her during pregnancy. Although their relationship is not explicitly acknowledged, the narrative subtly indicates the existence of an illicit affair. Periyannan's conduct reveals that he considers personal pleasure and satisfaction more important than the emotional well-being of his wife and family. His behaviour reflects a form of male domination in which men claim freedom for themselves while imposing restrictions and moral expectations on women.

As a road-construction contractor, Periyannan spends most of his time away from home. His visits to the family are occasional and largely superficial, primarily serving to reinforce his authority and ensure that the household remains under his control. During his prolonged absences, he engages in several extramarital relationships, pursuing his desires without considering the emotional and financial responsibilities associated with his family. His behaviour illustrates the unequal distribution of freedom within the patriarchal family structure, where men enjoy considerable independence while women are expected to remain submissive, faithful, and devoted to domestic responsibilities.

The portrayal of Vellaiammal, Periyannan's mother, further demonstrates how patriarchal oppression operates across generations. Her husband, who is Periyannan's father, is an alcoholic who subjects her to physical and emotional suffering and spends his earnings on liquor. His abusive behaviour leaves a lasting psychological impact on her. Even after his death, she remains frightened of him, suggesting how deeply domestic violence has affected her consciousness. Nevertheless, the narrator effectively portrays her courage, determination, and willingness to work despite her advanced age. Her experiences reveal how women are compelled to endure suffering within a patriarchal household. The authority exercised by men over women becomes a recurring pattern, transmitted from one generation to another. The acceptance of wife-beating, humiliation, and the denial of respect to women demonstrates the deeply rooted nature of patriarchal practices.

Education is another area through which male domination is exercised in the novel. Within the patriarchal social structure, female education is perceived as unnecessary and, at times, threatening to male authority. The prevailing assumption is that educating girls is a waste of resources because they are eventually expected to leave their parental homes after marriage, accompanied by the burden of dowry. Consequently, the benefits of their education are believed to serve their future in-laws rather than their own families. Furthermore, educated women are often perceived as becoming disobedient and disrespectful towards their parents. Such beliefs expose the patriarchal ideology that seeks to restrict women's intellectual development and independence.

Periyannan's treatment of his daughter Kala illustrates this oppressive attitude. Kala frequently visits Maariyaaye's house to borrow books and listen to the stories narrated by Maariyaaye's brother, popularly known as Dingumalli. However, Periyannan considers such activities unacceptable because he believes that girls should remain within the domestic space and avoid interacting with unfamiliar men. His anger becomes evident when he questions her: “Who gave you the courage to go and get the book from a man?” (48). His reaction demonstrates how patriarchal authority attempts to regulate even the intellectual interests and social interactions of young girls. Kala is not permitted to ride a bicycle, and any attempt to exercise such freedom results in physical punishment. Periyannan's violence extends beyond Kala, as he also physically assaults Aanandhayi. Through these incidents, Sivakami exposes how male authority controls women's mobility, education, and personal choices through fear and violence.

Periyannan's chauvinistic treatment of Aanandhayi reduces her to a subordinate position within the family. His repeated acts of domination create a profound sense of helplessness and emotional dejection in her. His treatment makes her question whether enduring such suffering is the only option available to her throughout her life. Aanandhayi's experiences reveal the psychological consequences of domestic oppression, particularly the way continuous humiliation and violence gradually weaken a woman's sense of self-worth

and freedom. Her inability to challenge Periyannan's authority also highlights the unequal power relations that characterise their marriage.

Periyannan's extramarital relationship with Lakshmi further exposes the complexity of male domination in the novel. While undertaking a contract to construct a bridge in Emaneri village, he becomes involved with a woman named Lakshmi, who is introduced to him as a prostitute. Attracted by her physical appearance, Periyannan establishes a relationship with her and begins living with her in a separate house in the same village until the construction work is completed. Initially, he conceals his marital status from Lakshmi. When she eventually discovers that he is already married, she is deeply shocked. Instead of acknowledging his deception, Periyannan brings her to his own house and expects her to live alongside his family. Lakshmi's response reflects her growing awareness of her position and her determination to exercise personal freedom. She asserts, “If a woman decides to go, then no force could ever stop her from doing so” (126). Her statement challenges the assumption that women must remain under male control and establishes her desire for independence.

Although Lakshmi initially enters into the relationship willingly, she gradually recognises Periyannan's selfishness and begins to resist his domination. Her rebellious attitude provokes his anger, and he resorts to physical violence to establish his authority. Unlike Aanandhayi, who largely endures his abuse, Lakshmi retaliates by hitting him and even attempts to attack him with a sickle. However, Mani intervenes because he cannot tolerate seeing his father being physically assaulted by a woman. His reaction does not necessarily arise from affection towards his father; rather, it reflects the influence of patriarchal conditioning and masculine pride, which cannot accept the possibility of a woman challenging a man's authority. Through this incident, Sivakami illustrates how patriarchal values are internalised by younger generations, enabling the continuation of male domination.

Lakshmi gradually understands that Periyannan has brought her into his household primarily to satisfy his desires rather than to provide her with dignity, security, or emotional fulfilment. Realising that she has been deceived and exploited, she expresses her anguish:

“I’m the loser, he drew me into the controversy- dragged me into a quarrel, beat me up and then now I’m abandoned and without even an ounce of regret about what has happened, he has now sought his pleasure from his wife happily. I am the loser.” (166).

Lakshmi's lament reveals the emotional consequences of Periyannan's selfishness and exploitation. Her statement exposes the unequal moral standards governing men and women. While Periyannan moves freely between relationships without experiencing social restrictions, Lakshmi is left to suffer the consequences of

his actions. Sivakami thereby questions a social order that permits men to exercise sexual freedom while denying women the same autonomy.

Lakshmi's escape deeply affects Periyannan's ego, and he decides to search for her. After spending considerable time and money, he succeeds in bringing her back. However, Lakshmi escapes once again with a lorry driver. With the assistance of his son Mani, Periyannan eventually discovers her whereabouts and brings her back through violence and intimidation. He subsequently subjects her to continuous physical and psychological torture. Her freedom of movement is severely restricted, and she is not permitted to go anywhere independently. Even when she needs to visit the fields, she must be accompanied by Poongavanam, with whom she shares her earlier experiences. This restriction demonstrates how Periyannan transforms the household into a space of surveillance and confinement, where Lakshmi's movements and personal choices are constantly controlled.

When Lakshmi escapes again, circumstances lead to her return to Periyannan's household. This time, instead of physically assaulting her, Periyannan confines her to a room and prevents her from moving freely. His change in method does not indicate any transformation in his attitude; rather, it represents a more systematic form of psychological domination. The continuous confinement gradually affects Lakshmi's mental and emotional stability. She becomes increasingly distressed, isolated, and unpredictable, frightening even Periyannan at times. Her withdrawal from the outside world reflects the devastating psychological consequences of prolonged abuse and deprivation of freedom. Eventually, she begins to perceive death as the only possible means of escaping her suffering and commits suicide. Her death becomes a tragic consequence of the oppressive conditions imposed upon her by Periyannan. Through Lakshmi's fate, Sivakami exposes the destructive consequences of patriarchal violence and the denial of women's individual freedom.

Significantly, Periyannan's life continues almost unchanged even after Lakshmi's death. His children grow up, but the patriarchal values that govern the family remain firmly established. Mani, who gradually assumes his father's position of authority, physically assaults Thanam when he discovers her relationship with Daniel, a Christian boy. His behaviour demonstrates the intergenerational transmission of patriarchal domination. Although the younger generation has grown up, it continues to reproduce the same oppressive attitudes and practices. By the conclusion of the novel, Periyannan remains unchanged despite his advancing age and continues to seek ways of controlling and subjugating women. For men like Periyannan, wealth, social status, prestige, and authority become the principal measures of personal success. Sivakami thus presents male domination not merely as an individual character trait but as a deeply rooted social structure sustained by successive generations.

II. Conclusion

The patriarchal family structure emerges as one of the principal institutions through which unequal power relations between men and women are established and maintained in Sivakami's Anandhayi. Within this structure, women are frequently treated as possessions rather than independent individuals, and their identities are defined by their relationships with men. Their sexuality, mobility, education, and personal decisions remain subject to male authority. Men, on the other hand, enjoy privileges and freedoms that are rarely extended to women. The unequal expectations surrounding marital fidelity, sexual conduct, and personal autonomy expose the double standards embedded in patriarchal society. In this context, the ideas expressed by Thanthai Periyar in Pen Yen Adimaiyaanaal (2009) provide a relevant perspective for understanding the historical and ideological foundations of women's subordination.

Alcohol consumption also emerges as an important factor associated with domestic violence in the novel. Periyannan's father's alcoholism and abusive treatment of Vellaiammal demonstrate how addiction can intensify domestic suffering and create an atmosphere of fear within the family. The relationship between alcohol consumption and violence further illustrates the vulnerability of women in households where male authority remains unquestioned. Similarly, the unequal moral standards governing sexual relationships reveal that male infidelity is often socially tolerated, whereas women are expected to maintain absolute chastity and obedience. The arguments advanced by Thanthai Periyar in Pen Yen Adimaiyaanaal (2010) offer a critical framework for examining these discriminatory social practices and the unequal moral expectations imposed upon women.

Through the characterisation of Periyannan, Sivakami presents a disturbing portrait of masculinity shaped by domination, selfishness, sexual privilege, and the desire for absolute control. His relationships with Aanandhayi, Lakshmi, and his children reveal different dimensions of patriarchal power. While Aanandhayi represents the suffering of a woman trapped within an oppressive marriage, Lakshmi embodies resistance and the desire for individual freedom. However, her tragic death demonstrates the devastating consequences of challenging an established patriarchal order without adequate social support. Mani's behaviour further establishes that male domination is not restricted to one generation but is reproduced through family relationships and social conditioning.

Sivakami's portrayal of male characters also exposes the contradictions inherent in conventional masculinity. Periyannan exercises authority within his household while disregarding the moral responsibilities expected of a husband and father. His pursuit of personal pleasure, involvement in extramarital relationships, and repeated acts of violence reveal the relationship between masculinity, morality, and power. Through realistic characterisation and the use of colloquial Tamil, Sivakami effectively represents the everyday realities of patriarchal oppression and the unequal relationships that exist within

ordinary households. Ultimately, Anandhayi demonstrates that male domination is sustained not only through physical violence but also through social customs, economic dependence, psychological intimidation, and the internalisation of patriarchal values. The novel therefore offers a significant literary critique of the continuing presence of male chauvinism and the complex structures of power that shape women's lives.

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