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### Gender-divide and a Turbulent Society

#### Abstract

This article is a translation of a research article by N Shankar Narayanan that has been cited below. This translation has not been published in any journals, book or magazine and it is the original translation of the article written by the author. The author of the article has consented for the translation and publication of the same.

Women have always been at the receiving end when a society is tumultuous, in spite of the scientific and technological advances it boasts of. தகனம் [*Thaganam*] (2001) is a Tamil novel by Andal Priyadarshini portrays such concerns. A 21<sup>st</sup> century family may not survive the financial burden it poses if both the husband and wife do not take up a job. It becomes a necessity that the act of a man opposing the idea of a woman taking up a job, just as a mental perception that is bent on being patriarchal. In such a society, the idea of man proving himself to be one, only if he gets a job, needs to be eradicated. By breaking such a social construct, a society should tame itself to focus only on the fact whether the family fetches enough money while the husband and the wife takes up a job. The resultant of such a social construct can be observed when a working woman consents to marry a man who earns more than her. Further, a society should also question when a woman does not receive the

same wage that man gets for the same kind of job. Both the gender should formulate ways, together to fight sexual harassment at work. Finally, in a turbulent society, a woman can lead her life peacefully only if punishment for sexual abuse and harassment are made severe in court of law and sex education being given properly to the members of the society.

The plight of women has remained the same in every society in the world devoid of the scientific progress and the technological advent it boasts of. Women do not seem to be at peace, constantly fighting for their freedom and rights. But it is the same group that is the base of all creation in this world, in other words, possesses the ability to give birth. A woman's plight starts from the day she is born. And India is no exception to it.

The times have changed from women being restricted from being educated. It was generally propagated by a patriarchal mind that a woman's place is in the kitchen and continue with her domestic chores. Such a state has transformed into the a phenomenon where it becomes difficult to name a field where women do not have their part. Women have started committing themselves to task which were previously perceived to be the job of a man.

The idea that men find it difficult to get employed because of woman who take up their job, springs from a very narrow mind. On the other hand, the idea of a woman being the bread winner of the family or to eat from her earnings is at times considered to be an issue of emasculation. It only throws more light into the patriarchal structure. Andal Priyadarshini's novel *Thaganam* (2001) takes into account the people who work in crematoriums, a group that is marginalised also by being given any importance at all, in a way that the plight of the group is exposed. The objective of the article is to use the abovementioned novel and the news articles of the present media to expose the turmoil of the society, the reason behind the turmoil when a woman goes to a job.

The days are long gone when women used to be dependent on a man, and now they have become independent. Women constantly prove that they can commit themselves to any field and any job that a man does. But a patriarchal mind is restless and justifies the instance of not having a job on the grounds of a woman taking his job. The novel reveals to the readers a false notion that might prevail among the society that women are the reason behind men losing their jobs. There is news circulated in social media that the reason for many graduates who are male to not get employed is because of the reason that it has been stolen away by women. The novel *Thaganam* portrays this particular perception of a patriarchal mind, “Women have even taken up the job of being a cremator. If women compete what would men like you earn? How can a family be supported?” (பொட்டச்சிங்க கூட வெட்டியான் தொழிலுக்கு வந்தாச்சு . அதுங்களெல்லாம் போட்டி போட்டா ஒன்ன மாதிரி ஆம்பளைங்க என்னத்த சம்பாதிக்க ? எப்படி குடும்பத்தைக் காப்பாத்த ?”;my trans.;18,*Thaganam*). says Erusappan. It brings to the light that even marginalised people believe that the employability of men is affected by women.

A marginalised society actually does approve the idea of a woman being the bread winner of the family. The social framework of the society allows women to work. The reason being, either the earnings of a man is less sufficient to run a family or he spends the earning on liquor, gambling etc. The indulgence in liquor drinking seems to be of most concern in draining the income of the family. Muniyamma a character in the novel exclaims,

He had lost his eye to excessive drinking. The taste buds still look for liquor...and spicy dried fish side dishes to go with the liquor...make sure Palani does not get gulped by the ‘liquor’ demon

கண்ணுதான் அவிஞ்சு போச்சு . நாக்கு போதை கேக்குது. காரசாரமா உப்பு ஒரைப்பா கருவாடு வேனுமாம்... பளனிய சாராயக் கஸ்மாலம் புடிச்சுக்காம பாத்துக்க (my trans.; 29, *Thaganam*)

to the newly wed Mariyamma. It could be understood from these lines that the effects of over-indulgence in liquor have broke the household and the life of women in the marginalised society. Hence the necessity arises for a woman from the society to go out and work even in menial jobs, so that she could support the family. In such a society, “Women have even taken up the job of being a cremator. If women compete what would men like you earn? How can a family be supported?” (பொட்டச்சிங்க கூட வெட்டியான் தொழிலுக்கு வந்தாச்சு . அதுங்களெல்லாம் போட்டி போட்டா ஒன்ன மாதிரி ஆம்பளைங்க என்னத்த சம்பாதிக்க ? எப்படி குடும்பத்தைக் காப்பாத்த ?”;my trans.;18,*Thaganam*), would a comment like this be treated on par with the same society that approves women to work? Does it become acceptable in such a society that a man invokes such a comment?

It could be interpreted that Andal Priyadarshini wishes to explain that the society would approve of a women’s’ job, if she commits herself to menial jobs like washing clothes, vessels, sweeping as a job that fetches money, but it would make men disquieted when she takes up the job that are generally considered to be a man’s job like a Cremator, and hence the patriarchal mind becomes restless. There is an explicitly expressed intention of subjugation of women. The novel holds many such instances. Hence a woman, physically and mentally keeps fighting these issues. Women consider this to be their progress, which is exhibited by these lines,

Hunger prevails, since there is no earning member in the family...so she has become a Cremator...look how daring she is... women will not be allowed even to participate in the last rites at a death house...but today she has become a Cremator

சின்ன பொண்ணுக்குக் கஞ்சியூத்த ஆள் இல்ல... மயானத்தில இறங்கிட்டா... பொட்டப் புள்ளக்கி எம்புட்டு நெஞ்சுரம் பாரு...கடைசி ஊர்வலத்துலயே வர விடாத பொம்பளைங்க ...இன்னிக்கி பொணம் எரிக்குதுண்ணே... உனக்கு அந்த தைரியம் வேணுண்ணே... (my trans.; 26, *Thaganam*),

through the voice of Mariamma, one of the woman characters in the novel.

This instance may not be taken as a feeling that arises out of men as a result of women taking up the job of men. The social construct is in such a way that a woman is meant to take care and administrate the family. On the other hand, a man is supposed to hard work and bring resources into the family. It is a given in any society in the world that considers that a man without a job is a dead man, and it can also be inferred from the Indian society. So being out of a job which might be due to various inabilities, inclusive of that of his own, gives birth to the tendency of him to blame a woman. There have been times when an employed male would get married to an unemployed or low-earning female. But it has to be understood from the current prevailing perspective, where women do not want to get married to a man who earns lesser than her. The quote from the novel, “I cannot drink tea from the earnings of a woman...you can go drink if you want...” (“பொட்டச்சி கணக்குல ட குடிக்கிற ஆளு நானில்ல... சோத்துல உப்பு போட்டுத்தான் திங்கிறேன்... நீ வேணாப் போயி குடி...”; 19, *Thaganam*) may be taken as coming from a patriarchal mind. But the perception concerning, what would men do if women take up their job, can not be easily dismissed as a patriarchal mind set. It denotes only to the fact that it is time that the society breaks these kinds of ideologies.

Though it should be appreciated that women take up jobs as equals and in fact it should be promoted too. Still there are companies which have a different intention in preferring to give a job to women instead of men. The intention is that women could be given more work and less wage, proving to be less expensive than employing a man, thus exploiting a woman.

Especially, in construction business the imbalance between wages for men and women doing the same job can evidently be observed. In the novel it is expressed by Chinnaponnu that, “Sir, why is that you always call me only when there is a difficult job to be

done and you throw it only on me” (“ப்.ச... என்னா சார்? எப்பவுமே கஷ்டமான வேலைய எந்தலைலதான் கட்டுவீங்க...”; my trans.; 73, *Thaganam*). These instances arise because of women, especially, by those who readily agree to a job that pays them much less than a man, even after being aware about it. This might be considered to be a reason which puts women in an unrest position.

Also, sexual harassment and abuse seems to be one of the many problems that stares into female gender. The victims of sexual predators' range between a girl to an eighty-year-old woman. The voices of the women who exclaim that such men go unpunished can be reverberated in the quote,

“Women are sniffed for pleasure by men...they are brought here to be cremated so that no problem arises...this has been their business all along...The girl can be burnt and turned into ash without proof...but there is a god who keeps stock of all these things...Could anyone escape without answering god?”

பொம்பள புள்ளிங்கள இவனுங்க சொகத்துக்கு மோந்துப்புட்டு பிரச்சனையாயிரக் கூடாதுன்னு எரிக்க வக்குறதே இவனுங்களுக்கு பொழப்பாயிருக்கு ..அந்த பொண்ணை எரிச்சு சாம்பலாக்கி இல்லாமப் பன்னிப்புடலாம் . ஆனா.. மேல ஒருத்தன் பாத்திட்டிருக்கானே..அவன் பார்வையிலிருந்து தப்ப மறைச்சுட முடியுமா? (my trans.; W49, *Thaganam*)

in the novel. There are large number of women who are put through sexual abuse at workplace. The police who should be the guardians, even have been accused of sexually abusing female police officers. And it cannot be denied that these things do not happen in India, now, because they have been happening. As a women writer she makes an attack on these issues wherever possible in the novel.

The perception stems from the patriarchal mindset inferred through religious ideologies and literature most of the time which considers women to be ‘sex objects’ and are

meant only for pleasure. The only step forward is to break the old traditions that exhibit patriarchal ideologies and rewrite them through the transformation of society by giving proper gender-based sex education. Yet another step in doing this involves strengthening the legislation against sexual crimes by levying strong punishment to offenders.

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