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The Dawn and the Ashes: A Comparative Study of Optimism and Pessimistic Fatalism in Pon Kulendiren's *The Dawn* and Imayam's *A Women Burnt*

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Abstract:

This paper investigate the subaltern resistance in current Tamil Literary fiction through a comparative analysis of two distinct ways of surviving psychologically and structurally, the defiant optimism of Captain Bhairavi as Sivagami in the novel *The Dawn* by Pon Kulendiren and fatalistic despair of Revathi in Imayam's *A Women Burnt*. In this framework of materialist feminist criticism and trauma, this paper also explores macro- political war between women and society that determine the boundaries set for women survival by this society. While Sivagami represent the strong mind that suppression of society which she fight against and came back as Captain Bairavi. Whereas Revathi, an engineer turned as ashes because of casteism, poverty and domestic violence that made herself to commit self-immolation in order to reclaim her bodily sovereignty. Through this juxtaposition of hopeful revolution and destructive ash. This paper focuses on the optimistic and pessimistic characters of the women who undergo difficult oppressions, and how the women should overcome by breaking all social boundaries which spoils their future.

Key words: Revolutionary Optimism, pessimistic fatalism, materialistic feminism, social boundaries, casteism, domestic violence.

Introduction:

Contemporary Tamil fiction becomes a kind of laboratory for exploring the limits of female suffering, empowerment and oppression. Whereas Third World Women in many stream of postcolonial feminist theories, is regarded as an unvarying entity of oppression, modern Tamil Literature provides the varied characteristics of female experience. This paper discuss two contracting depiction of female experience in the past how it changed in future as positivity and negativity. That linked their present psychology, here the character called Sivagami in Pon Kulendrian's *The Dawn* changed as Captain Bairavi in her future, and meanwhile Imayam's character Revathi in the novel *A Women Burnt* she was a strong girl in her past and her own decision to marry Ravi turned her life as tragic end.

Optimism in Sivagami:

In Pon Kulendiren's *The Dawn*, the transformation of Sivagami to Captain Bhairavi is brought about the harsh reality faced by a school girl in Sri Lanka during the civil war she faced the state of brutality and captured by the army and she had her courage and later saved by the Tamil liberation movement. Her joining of the militant struggles became her survival strategy.

Now the time has come to start a project called "The Dawn (Vidivu)". The Vidivu is not only for children have lost their parents and are intelligent and did not get a chance to progress with their studied. A young shoot if manured properly it will grow and provide what is needed by the people. Education is vital for them. (*The Dawn* 120)

Sivagami turns from being a subaltern women victim to an active political agent. Kulendrien used this character to represent many women tigers in the Liberation Movement. This macro- political conflict situation allows the subaltern women access to public agency that is usually inaccessible to them in a normal peaceful scenario.

Instead of being defeated by her plight, Sivagami becomes optimistic as a revolutionary. Despite the fact that Sivagami's family leaves to Canada where they become refugees in the hostile environment of Scarborough, she stays in Eelam. The decisions that she makes are based on the desire to bring political change. When her family eventually comes back and sees that she has been transformed, she still maintains a forward- looking attitude.

Captain Bairavi, please come and sit down. They have come to see you along way from Canada. Can you recognize them? Sivarajah master asked Bairavi. They are surprised to see Captain Bairavi without a leg. Onetime Captain Bairavi who was called Sivagami was good athlete and karate player. All of them had big hopes on Sivagami. The fate has changed her. (*The Dawn* 113)

Optimism is shown by her participation in the "Dawn" project for helping disabled children. It can be seen that the trauma of Sivagami is turned into a materialist optimism whereby she reconstitutes her war torn world through social activism. This character should viewed in terms of non-passive attitude towards life rather than mere psychological stance. In contrast to those characters who find themselves trapped in their state of victimhood, Sivagami raises above her personal experience of violence by using it for the creation of a shared force of resistance. Being kidnapped by the army of the state, Sivagami's identity of a passive girl to adopting the persona of Captain Bhairavi.

A beautiful women with one leg missing entered the room. From her beautiful eyes everyone immediately recognized the lady as Sivagami. "Meet Captain Bairavi, your one time Sivagami. She said with a beautiful smile "Vannakkam to all. Welcome to "Illam Thalir Illam" she never showed her feelings that she lost one of her legs. (*The Dawn* 112)

Pessimistic fatalism in Revathi:

Imayam's *A Women Burnt* provides another instance of entrapment through psychological breakdown. Revathi, who is an educated engineering graduate she takes her first instance by crossing social barriers to marry Ravi, and auto driver and she broke the caste barrier of her family and married him against her parents wish, her family never look her back after marrying this so called low caste boy. She suffered because of her husband and economic manipulation and emotional control that acted as a imprisonment for her life.

That guy was no match for our daughter in education, accomplishment, status, or caste, he wasn't fit in any way for her. A mongrel of an auto driver. A dog begging for food. It is your daughter who said she wanted that dog. Be quiet. Now no one will lose their honor. (*A Women Burnt* 93)

Imayam places her story almost entirely in a hospital ward where she lies dead due to her extensive burn injuries. The very context symbolize the complete closure of Ravathi. The fatalism of this character is alienated from her surroundings, while Sivagami has the crew support but in the situation of Revathi her parents itself didn't accepted her after her marriage with Ravi she stood alone and at the end she was surrounded by her family when she was in the hospital bed during her critical condition from burns this indicate unyielding attitude of her surroundings. Even though her father has enough money to

pay thousands for her treatment, none of it helps her in fighting the social structures that have ruined her life. The bed in the hospital room becomes a symbol of her being trapped. She finds out that there is nobody to take care of her except her.

Finally, Revathi's self immolation is the final articulation of her hopeless fatalism. This act is a dire and tragic way of taking control of her own physical self. Given how much the society in which she lived had robbed her of all choices and dignity in life. Unlike Sivagami who uses her agency to create a new dawn after the war, Revathi uses hers to destroy her prison.

Conclusion:

A comparative reading of Pon Kulendrien's *The Dawn* and Imayam's *A Women Burnt* completely rejects simplistic images of subaltern female victimhood in contemporary literature by showing that subaltern survival is not monolithic rather constituted to political and social context surrounding her. Sivagami and Revathi are not symbols of subaltern female sufferings and strict struggles through polarized society breaking through the traditional boundaries through optimistic perspective of outward looking and forward looking mentality.

In stark contrast, the tragic ending of Revathi serves to highlight the narrow environment of domestic tyrannies where the girl finds herself entrapped at the dangerous nexus of caste pride, poverty, violence within marriage being totally excluded form of outside support. Her gloomy pessimism is a rational reaction in a world where all means of escape have been shut down and restoring to a desperate move.

Overall, the paper suggests that there is no room for one template of subaltern resistance since true agency has a broad spectrum of emotions that include active creation of new dawn out of the ruins of war and desperate destruction of an abusive domestic environment into ashes.

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