

Women on Double Marginalization in Sivakami's *The Grip Of Change*

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Abstract

This article examines and Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*. It analyse the Double Marginalization of Dalit Women in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*. The form and nature of marginality depends upon the degree of economic, social or cultural impoverishment Marginality, based upon caste, creed, religion or race is a kind of disability or affliction and its root cause could be injustice or exploitation. The poor and unemployed Dalit's are discriminated against and disabled by a society which is caste ridden and hence is unconcerned about the problems of impairment. It also reflects in the ill – treat the women of lower castes first because of their caste and then because they are women in a patriarchal society. And it is to analyse the position of the oppressed in the Indian society and highlight problems of existing caste prejudice in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*. In this novel the writer picturises how dalit women are socially, economically and sexually exploited by the so called “upper caste Hindus” and not to overlook the abuse by their own men. The writer was exposes the atrocities germinating from gender discrimination and caste.

KEYWORDS: Marginalization, Oppression, Exploitation, Discrimination, Degradation

Sivakami's literary career started with the publication of the first short story collection Ippadikku Ungal Etartamullain 1987. She published her first novel Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum in 1989. It portrays the communal imbalances and the inferiorization of Dalit's. Later, her first novel was translated into English as *The Grip of Change* in 2006. Sivakami the Dalit writer in her own way amplifies the voice of the marginalized Dalit's by bringing to light their wretchedness and misery amidst the Caste-Hindus. She envisages a time where the Dalit's will be free but responsible and qualified; a time when the Dalit's will have social reforms, activists, educated women and forward-looking men with a prosperous vision. This is the continuum of a dream, in fact, Sivakami's dream of Dalit liberation.

Sivakami's novels portray the rustic story of women who suffer at the hands of men who strongly believe in and stand for patriarchy. The conflicts and struggles are between tenacious women and tyrannical men in the contemporary society. The central male character, Kathamuthu in the novel *The Grip of Change* lived in the poor village; are not only hungry for the power that money could bring them but also tyrannical in their treatment of the women in their life.

Sivakami brings women of many generations in her novel *The Grip of Change*. The character Kathamuthu is an example of the tyrannical and charismatic male characters who try to bring everyone under control. The novel for the most part portrays the discrimination between men and women in the small village especially

the sexual violation against Dalit women which has been seen as something natural and spontaneous. The Dalit girls are not allowed to attend schools after attaining puberty; the young women are subjected to sexual assaults by much older husbands, or sexually harassed or raped by fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law if they are widowed; they are subjected to regular beating by alcoholic husbands, and are burdened with heavy loads of work at home and also in the fields apart from nurturing their numerous children. The ignorant Dalit's do not recognize the importance of educating women. In the novel *The Grip of Change* Thangam was seduced by an upper caste Udayar and she was beaten on the street by his brother and brother-in-law. She had been insulted and had been dragged on the road. She was cursed and ill-treated for a mistake she hadn't committed.

Through the novel Sivakami portrays the painful real life of women suffering at the hands of men. The women suffer double marginalization because they suffer as they belong to the lower class and the suffering is augmented because of the patriarchal system. The man who has committed a crime by harassing a woman has no feeling of guilt. The men conveniently blame the women, making them feel as if they are worthless and pitiable. Men like Paranjothi Udayar thought that the women are born only to satisfy their carnal pleasures and to serve them. Even Sivakami in *The Grip of Change* portrays Kathamuthu as a domineering Dalit, usurping the rights of others. Only a selfless person can lead a community and can lift it up, whereas Kathamuthu proved himself to be a self-made leader disregarding the needs of his own people. He profited himself in the name of helping his people; when an elderly man requested Kathamuthu to make arrangement for the loans in the co-operative society,

The first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman, Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum went beyond condemning caste fanatics by using fiction with biographical elements to describe how human beings are shackled and tangled among ourselves. Instead of being the journey of her individual voice and consciousness, it is a unanimous expression of the youth of this oppressed community, "Parayar", eager and waiting for change.

The Grip of Change Gowri is the witness' account of the society around her, her observations, her sensitivity to the happenings around her and her responses to them. As a witness, she records the most serious issues of the Dalit's and how they are treated as inferiors at all levels in the society. Treated as low-caste people, the Dalit's are marginalised socially, economically, politically and exploited physically and psychologically. They are conditioned to accept their servility and the superiority of the upper caste. Through the character of Gowri the young girl, Sivakami, the writer traces the oppression exercised by the upper castes towards the Dalit's in terms of labour, exploitation and inhuman treatment. Throughout the novel, the writer records her personal experiences with agony and shame and it is a vibrant, personal as well as collective history of the Dalit's. Kathamuthu, a Dalit leader already married to Kanagavalli, takes on an upper class Hindu widow, Nagamani as his second wife. The Dalit woman, Kanagavalli, Kathamuthu's first wife, remains a mute spectator and even develops a bonding of friendship with his second wife, Nagamani. When Thangam, the Dalit woman is exploited by her upper class (Udayar) land lord, Kathamuthu champions her cause, exploits the situation to attain his own ends. The compensation cleverly obtained raising caste issue is enjoyed by Kathamuthu himself and later he exploits Thangam's vulnerability which leads to Thangam earning a place in Kathamuthu's home as the third woman in the household. In negotiating and

trying to probe into inter – caste sexual relations, the author sheds light on how patriarchy gets diluted on its way down the caste ladder. In the affair between the Dalit Kathamuthu and the caste Hindu widow Nagamani, she earns a rightful place as his second wife in his home. Conversely, Udayar's treatment of Thangam as his mistress is not brought within the socially approved relationship because of her caste. While the Dalit woman Kanagavalli, Kathamuthu's first wife gradually accepts the second wife into her household, Kamalam, wife of Paranjothi Udayar incites her brothers to assault her husband's mistress, Thangam. Even the Udayar is not ashamed of overpowering a low – caste woman for sex but is only ashamed of the news in a society that treats him as an upper caste man.

By speaking about the tyrannical over boringness, corruption and polygamy of her male characters, Sivakami speaks for the most vulnerable members of the Dalit community - its women!. Thangam, the low caste woman's history is constituted by her widowhood. Harassed by her brothers-in-law when she refuses to submit to them, she is not given her share of the family land as she does not have children. She has to earn her living by working in Udayar's land. She becomes a victim of the sexual advances by her upper caste landlord Paranjothi Udayar. But she dares not to raise her voice against this injustice for fear of social ostracism. In the name of loyalty to the one who gives her means of livelihood, she keeps quiet and her helplessness to assert herself speaks volumes of the silent agony undergone by Dalit women in the lands of uppercaste men. The wide range of nomenclatures used to denote Dalit's testify their socially known marginalities irrespective of the umpteen laws constituted for the protection and welfare of the marginalized classes.

Social marginalities vary from society to society and even in different parts of the same society. The second chapter of *The Grip of Change* throws light on the Parayar's being separated from their higher caste people's dwellings. In Puliur, the village and Cheri are almost joined. Perhaps, it is the few tamarind tresses that keep the Cheri and the upper caste apart. The village is the part where the caste Hindus live. The Dalit communities are confined to 'cheri', a ghetto located at the margins of the village. The vivid picture of the ghettos in which the Dalit's are confined to their isolation marks the social marginalisation. Sivakami talks about the experiences of the Dalit's through her character Kathamuthu, about how they are socially marginalized and not allowed to wear even chappal. They have to get down from bicycles and push the vehicle when they enter the Uppercaste Street

Kathamuthu continued, 'that I was the first one to wear sandals and walk on the upper caste street. In those days, our men had to get off their bicycles as soon as they entered that street and walk the length pushing the vehicle. But I had my hair cut, unlike others, and cycled on their street...' (67)

It is obviously a kind of disgrace that these Dalit's are subjected to. In *The Grip of Change*, only during the Mariyamman temple festival that the whole Cheri wears a festival look. The festival season is the only time in their entire life they eat and drink to their hearts' content. Despite the geographical division, the festival favourites of the Parayar's are pork and liquor. Sivakami acknowledges this in *The Grip of Change*.

On the last day of the festival, those who could afford it consumed mutton and those who could not ate beef. However, spicy fried pork accompanied by arrack was

the festival favourite. Sometimes groups of families got together to buy a pig and share its meat. The residents of PuliurCheri's north street had together contributed two hundred and fifty rupees and purchased a pig from Sirumalai.

The Dalit's in the novel are not spared from dishonour at any level. The upper caste people identify the Dalit's only by the community which they belong to. Sivakami observes that a condescending term 'Eley' is used to address the Dalit's. In *The Grip of Change*, Udayar's wife, Kamalam abuses a 12 year old boy from Cheri who works as a bonded labour in her house. Flinging threats and abuses at him was part of Kamalam's daily routine. On the morning the Udayar's and his cohorts have stirred caste prejudices and hostilities; Kamalam exceeds all limits of casteism. She sneers at him and even reduces his due of left-over food. She contemptuously waves a broom at him and her "Paraya, Paraya" studded talk forced even the 12 year old boy to wonder at her. Men, women and children irrespective of their age were subjected to shame. They were externally made to live at the mercy of the upper caste. Sivakami describes how untouchability has been rampant in their village. If someone happens to touch a Parayar, they feel that they are polluted. Dalit's are considered to be things for use. In Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*, Kathamuthu and Naicker enjoy the company of each other; still Naicker is quite conscious of his caste. His indirect exhibition of his caste consciousness infuriates Kathamuthu. Sivakami also gives a description of the communal fights between the Udayar community and the Pariahs. Udayar community puts fire to the huts of Pariahs'. But the Udayar's turn it into an accident. All the important offices, the water tank, the schools and Panchayat trees are situated in the area where the upper caste community live. The Dalit communities are confined to the Cheri, a ghetto located at the margin of the village.

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