

# Double marginalization of Dalit Woman: A Study of P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

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Pallanimuthu Sivakami's first Tamil Dalit novel *The Grip of Change* deals with many issues of social, political, economical and regional concerns. But its dealing with the question of rampant violence and prejudiced treatment against women of Dalit community is significance. Dalit women are generally projected to be detestable figures for their placement at the lower social rung. This chapter aims to study the plight of woman being dalit and being woman which is result of caste system and clutch of patriarchy.

Sivakami in *The Grip of change* exposes man's duplicity through the character of Kathamuthu. The patriarchal force working in the figure of the community leader and Gauri's father- Kathamuthu everywhere tries to suppress the progressive and modern feminine sensibility overflowing in Gauri from her childhood. Gauri possesses an aesthetic sense for natural beauty. She is overwhelmed to see the wild flower bloomed in their house's courtyard. Before going out she never forgets to put kolam into her eyes and decorate her hair with the wild flowers. Kathamuthu is repulsive about such flamboyant attitude of Gauri and therefore he use to keep scolding her. But despite these unjust prohibitions Gauri continues to live her desires secretly. Sivakami projects Gauri's this indefatigable will to the plant of wild flower blooming in the courtyard of Kathamuthu.

The flowers on this plant keep blooming even in the adverse conditions. It survives on the rare supply of water and the occasional sunlight it gets through the branches of bigger tree. Similar is the case with Gauri: the more her father chides her the more she becomes determined to combat the oppressive patriarchal authority. First Tamil Dalit novel *The Grip of Change* is a distinct piece of creative writing where Sivakami has presented a panorama of various shades of feminine consciousness. Throughout the novel, Sivakami illustrates the highly corrupted Dalit leadership and the severe treatment of women by Dalit men as well as non dalit men. Thangam can be categorized into both as a modern feminine character as she raises voice against her high caste perpetrator but she is a traditional female character as she bears Paranjothi Udayar as well Kathamuthu's exploitation silently. Dalit women are victims of widespread exploitation, violence and indecent, inhumane treatment.

Their life stories are stuffed with physical and verbal abuse and sexual violence, including rape, which give insight into how their social position makes them vulnerable to these human rights violations. Numerous religious practices and specific social customs subject Dalit women in particular to discrimination. Most often violence against Dalit women is used as a means of punishment and demonstration of power by the dominant castes towards both the woman herself and her community. This gruesome reality of society is depicted in the present novel through the character of Thangam- childless widow who is tormented at different stages of life. Thangam means 'gold' but in this novel, she is misused, she is related to the misdeeds and lust of the people as gold can be related to the yearning of people.

Thangam was denied to have the rightful share in her husband's property because she was childless. She started earning her two ends meal by working in the fields of an upper caste Hindu named Paranjothi Udayar. But one day seeing Thangam alone in the fields the landlord seduced her and threatened her not to reveal his secret to anyone. Thangam kept quite but her silence was misused and she was forced to become a concubine by Paranjothi. When Paranjothi's brothers in laws came to know of this secret affair they attacked Thangam at night and pulled her hairs, beaten her battered body. Nobody from her community or neighbor came to help her. At last Thangam went to Kathamuthu- the politically influential lower caste leader. Kathamuthu managed to bring justice to Thangam but ultimately entrapped her sexuality and kept her at his home as his third wife.

This chapter is devoted to bring out the submissive as well aggressive roles of women in Dalit community as portrayed in *The Grip of Change*. Sivakami's depiction of presumable facts brings the Dalit lifestyle in rural society polarized by caste and social hierarchy. When the question of dalit women is concerned, the struggle is completely different from the Upper Caste men and women, and even it is different from the problems of Dalit men. A famous statement 'Woman is a Dalit from Beginning to End' seems really a naked truth at this stage just because of this struggle of the Dalit women against the society, against their own outset and against the traditions their men follow. The oppressive system crushes down the

originality, warmth, delicacy and tenderness in them. They are destroyed almost at every stage by every ruler of their world and by the high caste rulers outside their world. Meena Kandasamy asks a question in this response, "If the system does not allow a woman to marry a man because he is from another caste ... is it not a direct oppression of her sexuality?" Dalit women are placed at the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy as they face structural discrimination of threefold: as Dalits, as poor, and as women. As women they are subjugated by patriarchal structures, both in the general community and within their own family. As a result of this Dalit women are subjected to inhumane living conditions and human rights violations; discrimination and violence systematically don't give them opportunities, choices and freedoms in all spheres of life.

The nature of violence against Dalit women is accompanied by equally systemic patterns of impunity for the perpetrators. The causal links that result in the deprivation of political, civil, economic and social rights of Dalit women are multiple. They suffer from gender bias in the same way as non-Dalit women, but caste and class status deprive them further. Compared to non-Dalit women their status of health and education is low. They are also restricted in employment opportunities and confined to unclean occupations, such as manual scavenging, due to the notion of purity and impurity embedded in the caste system. Gowri and even the novelist – P. Sivakami focuses on the major events and incidents in the lives of the Dalit and the women are portrayed with that true and vivid picture of victimized society. They are doubly marginalized as they remain silent victims of even the Dalit men. They are doubly marginalized as they remain silent victims of even the Dalit men. Vaishali Shivkumar writes:

Through Thangam, the novelist gives a thorough picture of Dalit women's silence and their being victimized by the Upper Caste Hindus as well as they are sexually exploited by their own caste men equally. Body and misuses of the bodily pleasures become a central motif of the novel and yet the novelist does not glamorize sexuality by smattering the text of the novel with careless elopements and gauche marriages. The majority of the description part in the novel focuses on the incident which takes place with Thangam and her body. Her body bears acknowledgment to the difficulties faced by Dalit women. (359)

She is a widow and so she becomes a 'surplus' woman when is harassed by her brothers-in-law. Women can be the instruments to be enjoyed, of entertainment or joy for the men of their caste as well as the men of the Upper castes but they cannot raise their voice against this kind of crimes. Men and women of different castes can fall in love but when the society punishes them, it punished the woman only and not the man. Especially, when the love-affair or physical suppression is done on the Dalit woman, she becomes the victim for the man who misuses her as well as the victim of the society. Thangam described the torment to Kathamuthu that she has gone through.

My husband's relatives spread the story that I had become Paranjothi's concubine. That's why Paranjothi's wife's brothers and her brother-in-law, four men, entered my house last night. They pulled me by my hair and dragged me out to the street. They hit me, and flogged me with a stick stout as a hand. They merely killed me. No one in the village, none of my relatives, come to help me. I begged for mercy, but they wouldn't stop. They abused me and threatened to kill me if I stayed in that village any longer. They called me a whore. (6, Sivakami)

Kathamuthu asks her whether she is speaking is truth or not; what actually she has done without thinking about her 'feminine' qualities. How can she speak everything in front of a man who is almost new to her except his name and fame? Still with shame and fear she accepts the truth, 'Udayar has had' (7, Sivakami) her but that is not the complete truth. She speaks the truth of events to Kathamuthu,

Sami, is there anywhere on earth where this doesn't happen? I didn't want it. But Udayar took no notice of me. He raped me when I was working in his sugarcane field. I remained silent; after all, he is my paymast er. He measures my rice. If you think I'm like that, that I'm easy, please ask around in the village. After my husband's death, can anybody say that they had seen me in the company of anyone, or even smiling at anyone? My husband's brothers tried to force me, but I never gave in. They wouldn't give me my husband's land, but wanted me to be a whore for them! I wouldn't give in. ... (7, Sivakami)

Trying to explore inter-caste sexual relations, P. Sivakami 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 right place by being 'installed' as his wife in his home. On the other hand, when Paranjothi Udayar forces himself on Thangam, at best engages her as a mistress. She is not brought within the confines of a socially approved relationship because of her being outcaste. When everybody in the family gets asleep in the afternoon, Thangam – Who is lying in the kitchen – is again raped by Kathamuthu. She groans, "You are like a brother to me ... a brother" (93, Sivakami). Thangam's eyes remain shut as she cannot face a man, who was once compassionate and sympathetic towards her, becomes full of lust and destroys

herself psychologically – again into pieces. Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement “one is not born woman, but, rather, becomes one” suggests the construction of ‘woman’, definitely the agent of which is the other gender (8, Butler). This is the simple reason why according to Beauvoir, the ‘woman’ becomes the second sex/ gender. Beauvoir, Butler and Foucault talk about the question of power in the society.

The distribution of that power focuses on the construction of social status of the gender. Due to social milieus being patriarchal, the power remains with them only. With the help of the character of Thangam, Sivakami does not only want to focus on the patriarchy of the common society but also she wants to expose the truths of the Dalit patriarchy and the shocking harsh realities of Dalit Movement as a whole. Gowri as a daughter is completely against the theory of her father’s politics and mentality to misuse women in every possible way. She thinks that women should have the right to live according to their own thoughts and they should get their own freedom. After the incident of Kathamuthu’s sexual assault of Thangam, Gowri shouts, “Dogs! Dogs in this house! Shameless as dogs!” (93, Sivakami) Gowri cannot accept this kind of lusty eyes and behavior in men and particularly in her father that is why she detests her father. She does not like her father as a polygamist and loutish. Gouri’s notions of the civilized world are completely modern and far from her father’s primitiveness or crudeness.

The focus is on the marginalized Dalit women who are the victims of the patriarchal system of society. This shows how suddenly the clouds of caste, gender and patriarchy are in the sky to partially cover the Sun of the human life and its sustainability. This creates a problem as the down-trodden people get a deteriorated place in the social system of hierarchy because of that. Caste, gender and patriarchy do not only destroy the psychological peace of the females living rather suffering under that roof but it also destructs the feministic emotions. Slander becomes slaughter-house for the women like Gowri and Thangam as they are marginalized because of caste, gender and patriarchy and its consequences.

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