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**Double Marginalization of Dalit Women in  
Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of  
Women***

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The present paper aims at analyzing the Double Marginalization of Dalit Women in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*. 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 Dalits are discriminated against and disabled by a society which is caste-ridden and hence is unconcerned about the problems of impairment. The present paper focuses on the marginalization of Dalit women as reflected in the novels of P. Sivakami as the communities insult and ill – treat the women of lower castes first because of their caste and then because they are women in a patriarchal society.

The selected two novels of Sivakami deal with the sorrows and sufferings, trials and tribulations, despair and degradation, poverty and powerlessness of the Dalits. The novels are one lofty image of the grief of Dalits especially the women who are devoid of the inevitable essentials such as human dignity, liberty, honour, justice, education and security. Gowri in *The Grip of Change* and Anandhayi in *The Taming of Women* suffer and are denied their rightful place in the society. If the pain of the Dalits has been born from the womb of rejection, then hope, the corollary of pain, has to spring from the heart of revolution and Sivakami's women who suffer because of the pain inflicted on them by the so-called upper caste people fight with the spirit of hope and try to change the society.

Sivakami, the Dalit writer in an interview to the Gulf News has pointed out the need for Dalit writers, especially feminists to speak out boldly. She said,

. . . Dalit feminists, who speak for their women and spearhead causes like

inter-caste marriages, are often branded separatists. They may be on the

periphery — but they ironically form the core issues because they speak

for large numbers who have been affected by discrimination. The Dalit

feminists need more encouragement from the country to emerge from their

shells.

P.Sivakami, born in 1957, is a post graduate in History. Later she took up IAS exams as she thought that she would gain wealth and status in the society by coming to such high position. She got through her exams, but considered writing as her first priority. She derived a lot of pleasure from reading and writing. So even after becoming an IAS officer, she continued writing. She became a full time writer in 2008 after taking voluntary retirement from Government Service. From then on, she has been working for the upliftment of the Dalits. She is the first Tamil Dalit Woman to write a novel *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum* in 1989. A literary and commercial success, the novel created a stir by taking on patriarchy in the Dalit movement. The novel is translated by the author herself and published in English as *The Grip of Change* (2006). The second novel *Anandhayi* is about the violent treatment of women. The novel is translated by Pritham K Chakravarthy as *The Taming of Women* (2011). Sivakami has written four critically acclaimed novels, all of them centred on Dalit and Feminist themes. She has written numerous short stories and poems focusing on similar issues.

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 characters, Periyannan and Kathamuthu in the novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* lived in the poor villages; both are not only hungry for the power that money could bring them but also tyrannical in their treatment of the women in their life, be it their wives or their old and ailing mothers or their daughters or the other women for whom they had an insatiable appetite.

The opening chapter of the novel *The Taming of Women* is introduced with a bang. Periyannan's wife Anandhayi was in labour while he had taken another woman to sleep with him upstairs, brought to him by the midwife with whom too, Periyannan often had physical connection. The male domination in a woman's life is brought out clearly in this novel. Anandhayi had no illusions about him, though she wished, that he would not get his women home. The physical violence the women saw and are subjected to on the basis of their being Dalits, made one daughter Dhanam, a rebel, while the other daughter

Kala became apathetic. Periyannan was the king of all he surveyed under his control. Periyannan married Lakshmi, whom he got home as his second wife. His desire for Lakshmi was so much that he did not mind risking everything he had – his wealth, respect, work and status in his attempt to gain control over Lakshmi. When she did not act according to his wishes, Periyannan was much hurt; he saw it as a blow to his egotism. Driven by such madness he assaulted her violently and drives her to the point of suicide.

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 Dalits do not recognize the importance of educating women. Even in *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. What could such helpless women do, when their own sisters betrayed them? Her sister-in-law, Valliammai indeed took pleasure in abusing her, “ ‘They beat her up. Good! Why did they leave her alive? That whore thinks too much of herself. She thinks that she's very beautiful. That's why she went after that Udayar. When she loses her shape, he'll throw her out, and she,'ll be in a state worse than a dog's' ”( 28).

The main woman character in the novel *The Taming of Women* is the industrious Anandhayi married to the womanizer Periyannan. The characters in the novel like and her mother-in-law, Chinnasami and Lakshmi are infused with originality. These men preferred to have contact with many women as they considered that as a matter of pride. The women were hept by them in order to assert their virility or to teach a lesson to their legally wedded wife or simply because they lusted after women. It is of much significance, however, that such women happen to be always poor, without any social support and are either widows or abandoned by their husbands. The representation of the other women is a significant entry point to the discussion of power relations within a Dalit community. Such a woman is an obvious victim of male power. Lakshmi suffered pain and humiliation because of the treatment given by both the father and the son. “Even before he was done speaking, he grabbed a bunch of her hair. ‘Heck, let go . . .’ She initially tried to break free. Then she let her hair remain

like a goat ready to be sacrificed on Deepavali. He rolled her head around as if it were a pestle and then let go after a few abusive words”(140).

Through these two novels 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.

C.S.Lakshmi's question found in the appendix of the novel -*The Grip of Change* is worth mentioning here in this context: “why does sexual power work differently for women and men of different castes? Why is it that the lower caste woman is raped by the upper caste man, but the lower caste man always sexually satiates the upper caste woman?”(199)

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, Kathamuthu replies,

That's my main job, isn't it? I have no other work! Do you know when I had breakfast yesterday? At nine in the morning! After that I had to bathe and leave for the police station. I just got half an hour's rest after lunch. Every day something or the other happens and I have to skip breakfast or lunch. My health is spoiled. And I have to work on my land too. You spend all your time in your fields and enjoy the benefit. You have fresh vegetables, fruits. Look at me. I can't pay any attention to agriculture. I have to go every day to the vegetable shop to buy stale, not fresh, food. I have no money to educate my daughter. The rules of the cooperative society are such that without cooking up accounts you can't get a loan-all that takes money. And if I keep doing your work how will I make a living? (36)

These lines highlight the egocentric nature of Kathamuthu. His character elucidates the selfish nature of the Dalit leader. Such leaders prove themselves to be hypocrites and exploit their kith and kin. In the author's notes to *The Grip of Change*, the author remarks:

It wasn't simply that the upper castes exploit the lower castes. A lower caste leader might exploit his own people. It is not only upper caste men who prey upon lower caste women. Men like Kathamuthu are perfectly capable of taking advantage of vulnerable women. The overall picture presented by the

novel is that rich or poor, upper caste or lower caste, the seeds of corruption exist at all levels.(149)

The Dalits have darkness spread around them and also within them. To wear the new clothes of hope, advancement and aspiration, they have to get rid of the torn clothes such as submission, intra-dalit strife and illiteracy. Sivakami says in *The Grip of Change*:

The lower castes are also the have-nots, and the haves are the upper castes; the division is clear. They cannot avoid clashing with each other. As the lower castes are several and divided, they are not able to offer a tough fight to the upper castes. The lower castes should shatter their particular identities and identify themselves as one class. The Dalits form the last rung of the labour class. If the struggle is centred on the Dalits, class and caste equality will be attained.(180)

The Dalits have to renew themselves to become emancipated. Trust is the only ship that can land them ashore. Only by changing themselves, they can be an instrument of change. It is time that they ceased to survive as Dalits and started living as human beings growing within them the rose of hope. A poem by Shankar Painter, a Gujarati poet who roars with a heart-piercing cry is given below to drive home the point that the Dalits are, above everything, human beings

Hey Brother Break the Begging bowl

Do not extend hand for begging

By begging the Rights cannot achieved

Change the history

Brother Break the Begging bowl.(qtd.in Prasad 147)

Most of the Dalit women get married out of compulsion and circumstance. They are forced by the manmade destiny to lead their life as prescribed to them. Oppression to a greater or lesser extent produces anger or hurt and oppression and injustice form an inevitable part of an untouchable's life, especially the Dalit woman, which has become a life of tolerance and sacrifice. The atrocities that are carried out on Thangam had greatly affected her psyche, completely changing her way of life and thoughts.

Whenever Thangam remembered her life in Puliur, she wept. She equated the incident in the sugarcane field with the repulsive experience of stepping on shit while walking on a riverbank. She could not recover easily from the sorrows and troubles she had suffered. The shock of being dragged out by her hair in the middle of the night to be beaten up like an animal had affected

her mind deeply. She would gasp awake at night at the slightest sound. “She hated the memory of Udayar’s sexual use of her body. Once she used to plait her long hair, but she no longer bothered with that. She pinned it up without any care and covered her head with her sari”(87).

In the same way the character of Lakshmi of *The Taming of Women* is also described. When she was mentioned to Periyannan, she was referred to like this; “ ‘Fair? Imagine saffron drowned in warm milk-or a rose petal. Whether you look at her from front or from behind, you will keep looking forever’ ”(90). But after that she was treated like a bitch by Periyannan, who always tried to bring the women under his control. Voracious in his appetites, for both power and sex, Periyannan proved himself to be a domineering male character.

Periyannan and Kathamuthu had always dominated their people. The poem “We will Rebuild Worlds” written by Meena Kandasamy talks about the same kind of experience of Dalit women in their lives.

but the crimes of passion  
 our passion  
 your crimes  
 poured poison and pesticide the ears-nose-mouth  
 or hanged them in public  
 because a man and woman  
 dare to love  
 and you wanted  
 to teach  
 other boys and other girls  
 the lessons of  
 how to  
 whom to  
 when to  
 where to  
 continue their caste lines.(60-62)

Sivakami towards the end of the novels laments how even for a modern and educated Dalit woman, life still continues to be a struggle and caste a marker of identity in the society. In other words, caste and oppression of women go hand in hand.

The women in the two novels suffer because they are women, because they are poor, and because they are Dalits. Sivakami's novels gleam with the spirit of hope and change and also try to accelerate the morale embedded deep inside the heart of the Dalits. The selected two novels of Sivakami deal with the sorrows and sufferings, trials and tribulations, despair and degradation, poverty and powerlessness of the Dalits. The novels are one lofty image of the grief of Dalits especially the women who are devoid of the inevitable essentials such as human dignity, liberty, honour, justice, education and security. Though Kanagavalli and other women in *The Grip of Change* and Anandhayi in *The Taming of Women* suffer and are denied their rightful place in the society, there are some points where they express that they cannot put up with sufferings endlessly. Through the portrayal of Gowri in *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami has shown how in spite of all odds they rise up in their life having their own dreams. When all unite together and stand for their rights and make others understand that they too are human beings with their own dignity and rights to lead their life on earth, the realization of the dream of universal brotherhood will not be faraway.

The Dalit writers or Dalit literature as such could contribute towards establishing a world which will have place for all to live in harmony. Darshana Trivedi in *Multicultural Literature in India: Critical Perceptions* says about what the Dalit writers could achieve with Dalit literature;

Dalit literature must cross the boundaries of national literature and seek to create a space in world literature. Like Black literature it must be everyman's literature. Black literature talks about the sufferings and pain of Negroes, yet from the personal sufferings, Black literature rises to the summit of universal literature through the writings of Toni Morrison, Maya Angello and Alice Walker. This is because of the creative attitude which the writers adopt. If Dalit writers move beyond the mundane and superficial; if they strive for expression of human experience in the universal sense, then they will be there to stay.(33-34)

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