



THE TWICE MARGINALISED IN SIVAKAMI'S *GRIP OF CHANGE*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse the position of the oppressed in the Indian society and highlight problems of existing caste prejudice in Sivakami's "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 exposes the atrocities germinating from discrimination gender and caste wise.

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Grip of change* written by Sivakami was first published in Tamil in 1989 and later translated to English by the author herself. Through the women character Thangam, the author portrays the plight and sufferings of the downtrodden. The sufferings of the untouchables is a never ending chain for several decades now. Power and economical background is the main source for hierarchical structures of caste. People who have power and position are placed at the centre of the society and they become dominant groups while the poor and the powerless are pushed to the marginalised.

"The power determines the position of social group and the individual. Depending on the power and position of social groups, they are placed either at the center or on the fringes- margins- of a given society." (Dr.Kleetus K.Varghese, 15).

Dalit women in India are alienated on the basis of their caste. Rape and molestation are unleashed as weapons against the dalit women to crush their identity. This novel focuses on incidents in the lives of downtrodden to show how the dalit women are doubly marginalized both as a woman and as a dalit.

Caste on Woman

The story revolves around the character Thangam, who lived in Puliur. She is left poverty stricken and uncared for by her family members after the death of her husband. She worked in Udayar's sugarcane field for her survival. One day she was raped in the sugarcane field by her pay master, Paranchothi Udayar. Unable to offend Udayar because of his power and political background, the downtrodden remain afraid of him. Thangam also maintained her silence. Thereafter he made advances and regular forced himself on her with an act of daresness. She had no choice. One day Udayar's brother in law saw Thangam and Udayar together and conveyed this to Kamalam whose brothers beat her up cruelly until she bled.

Thangam sought the help of Kathamuthu, the parayar community leader. She described how she was raped by her paymaster in the sugarcane field and explained how she who never smiled at another men after her husband's death, but yet had to undergo the shame and violation of her womanhood. Kathamuthu advised her to choose the men of her own caste. Instead of offering a solution for the assault by an upper caste man. He uttered :

“upper caste women commit adultery, is that addressed in the panchayat? Can we punish those women? They beat her up because we are lower caste, poor, and have no protection.” (Grip of change, pg. 38).

Thangam is unfortunate to be left in the cold without protection. She suffered both as a woman and as a dalit. Kathamuthu helped her to lodge a false complaint against Udayar. He manipulated the whole story and said that when Thangam took a walk on the street frequented by upper class people to attend nature call Udayar's wife abused her :

“You paraya bitch, how dare you walk on this street” (Grip of change, pg.11) .

Thereafter she and her brother cruelly beat her up till she bled. The policemen who came for enquiry favoured the upper caste and accused Thangam by declaring she had an illegal affair with Udayar and consequently Udayamma's relatives physically assault her.

“How can a Udayachi put up with her husband having an affair with a Parachi” (Grip of change , pg. 30).

Policemen was used the caste name derogatively. They received bribe from Udayar and told him an idea to file a false complaint against Thangam , that she stole money and a transistor from his house. When Kathamuthu heard about this he sent one of his men to guard Thangam's house.

Udayar was angry as he never thought that Thangam , a lower caste labourer would betray him. She should be grateful for a man like Udayar to have touched her, instead she betrayed him. Further he said,

“Ungrateful whore! Even if she was, hurt hurt by the hand adorned with gold ! A parachi could have never dreamt of being touched by a man like me! my touch was boon granted for penance performed in her earlier births! And then the dirty bitch betrays me! How can I face the world with my name thus polluted” (Grip of change, pg. 31).

He had no fear of police and courts.

“He could have braved it out even if it had been a murder or a assault. But what a disgrace if he had to own up to a relationship with a parachi! (Grip of change , pg . 32).

The upper caste people planned to hire workers from the neighbouring village after this incident. They were ready to pay more for the neighbouring labourers rather than to the men / women of lower caste. The discrimination was based on the different categories of work undertaken.

“Pallars were agricultural labourers, Parayars were drummers and menials and the chakkiliars were cobblers. The first grade pallars were absent in Puliur. The Pallar were considered themselves superior to the rest. The parayars considered themselves higher than the chakkiliars , who themselves considered higher than the paravannars washer man community”(Grip of change, pg.63).

For lower castes parayan, plan, valluvan, chakkilian, vanna are considered to be of different categories while for the upper caste considered these divisions went unrecognised as all of them were the dalits.

Few days later three huts in the Cheri was burnt down. The dalits believed that the upper caste people burnt the Cheri because of their refusal to work for them. This ensured a communal riot among the two groups. At last the police entered the village for a reconciliation. To ease the issues , the upper caste people were advised to accept their demands and offer compensation for the victims with an increase of fifty paise on their daily wages. Kathamuthu demanded of Paranchothi Udayar a sum of twenty thousand rupees as compensation for Thangam. But Udayar denied it . Finally he parted with ten thousand rupees as compensation.

Kathamuthu goes on to deceive Thangam. One night Thangam was offered arrack by Kathamuthu’s wife and later he physically abuses her and she is forced to settle down in Kathamuthu’s house as his third wife.



“In present- day – society a dalit women is also considered to be unequal to her man. Today, dalit women , who constitute the major working force, are thrice alienated and oppressed on the basis of their class, caste and gender. (John E.Mary , pg . 445-450).

The dalit man unleashes his frustration and establishes his supremacy in the human society by harrasing the women of his community. The dalit woman enjoys no safety being victimized , exploited ravaged and mercilessly run down both by the men and by the caste divisions. Women through education can acquire financial independence. This could render them free from the clutches of exploitation and endow them with the courage to question and fight all discrimination. Sivakami offers a world of possiblities with a world of negativities.

Let’s look at this novel in absentia of clanship. There is scenen no respect for the women of their own clan. The writer for the first time is not only exhibiting the power struggle outside the Dalit community but also laysbare the contrast and contradictions that exist within the marginalized sections. Therefore the cure to these conflicts could be had only with mutual respect , Feeling of oneness , the solidarity to fight against their disparaging position in the society with one mind , one body and one force.

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