

## CHAPTER III

### VOICE OF THE VOICELESS

One of the most controversial topics regarding Indian society and its culture is its rigid caste system, which divides its people based on their birth into water-tight compartments, restricting mobility. Despite the legal abolition of untouchability in independent India, the effects of discrimination continue even to this day. The Dalits constituting the lowest strata find themselves in the most disadvantageous situation. Dalits are indulged in a perennial search for their own identity. These subalterns have started speaking through literature, but the majority or the dominant group suppresses the voice, language, tone, style or tradition of this subaltern group, just like the colonized were victimized by the colonizer because of the power the colonizers had at that time.

Dalit literature is a protest against such practices. It gives voice to those whose voices were suppressed for a long period of time. There are many qualified wordsmiths and prominent Dalit writers like Sivakami and Iyayam who have started expressing their concerns for their society through the medium of writing. Dalit literature is a literature written to bring about a change in the society and through their works these writers express their wish that they too should be let to live with dignity. These Dalit writers write about their own experiences and sufferings in the caste –ridden society. There are also writers who are non- Dalits but write about the issues of Dalits and hence their contribution to Dalit literature.

Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal in the article “Only Ash Knows the Experience of Burning: An Interview with Dalit Writer Jai Prakash Kardam” in the book *Righting the*

*Wrong: Perspectives on Dalit Literature* discusses the difference between Dalit literature by a Dalit and literature about the Dalit by a non-Dalit. Jai Prakash Kardam quotes,

“Only ash knows the experience of burning.” This indicates that Dalits know the experience of burning – burning in the fire of sorrows, hatred, disrespect, injustice, inequality and untouchability. Non - Dalits do not have this experience. Dalits have specific experiences of life, which non-Dalits do not have. Only Dalit writers can express their experiences in an authentic manner but not others. Non-Dalit writers may be sympathetic to the Dalits, they may be their well-wishers but their experiences about Dalits are not their self-experiences. They are the observers of torture and exploitation of Dalits, they are not sufferers. This difference of experiences between Dalit and non-Dalits makes the difference between the writings of Dalit and non- Dalit writers .(22-23)

In our society those who are born in a lower caste have been leading traditionally and ritually impure lives and associated with occupations such as cleaning streets, latrines and sewages, tanning leather, removing the bodies of dead animals and butchering. Since they have been doing filthy and abominable work, they have been treated as untouchables by the upper caste people. Dalits have been undergoing the worst experiences of injustice and cruelty and have been leading dehumanized and degraded lives as a result of the caste-based tendencies.

Imayam’s novel *Beasts of Burden* is one of the best examples of the poor Dalit people and how they live in their lifetime and get their basic needs. It gives a clear picture of a lifestyle that is led by the poor low caste Arokkyam family.

Sauri was just about to scoop the grain with it. Azhagan stopped him summarily, and gave him an old, threadbare, partly split muram instead. It was with this muram the Karuppaayi had been gathering up the rubbish from the threshing floor and throwing it out.

‘Scoop it with this da.’

‘I can’t measure it with that, saami.’

‘if you can’t, then just go.’

‘Why are you speaking so sharply, saami? Where can we go if we just leave you?’

Arokkyam stood there, stunned and unnerved. She never expected that Azhagan would speak to her like this.(65)

Dalit literature brings out reality in all its nakedness in front of all the readers. It shows that how human beings exploit their fellow human beings and force them to live a life that is worse than the animals, it shows how the power structures work in a society and how these power structures are consolidated and concretized by the coming generation. Dalit literature is a call to the conscience of the people who live only in the boundaries of their houses. Dalit literature shocks them out of their luxurious and indifferent lifestyles. The Dalits were not only treated badly, they were dehumanized.

The plight of the Dalits is brought out by Jitender More in his article “Dalit Literature: Some Issues” in *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research*. He quotes the words of Tapan Basu who talks about similar Issues.

Sometimes, “untouchables” had to ring a bell to announce their polluting arrival, and to wear spittoons around their necks (in the case, for example,

of the Andekoragas of Madras) so as to catch any polluting spittle that might drop from their lips. There was even a caste of “ensembles (The ParadaVannans of Tinnevely district) who washed the clothes of other “untouchables” by night and hid their polluting selves by day.(Basu, XIX)

Caste represents the most memorable, comprehensive and successful attempt ever made by an order to oppress humanity in its own interest. Its enactments broke up the race into many fragments never to be reunited, separating Aryans from other peoples by impassable barriers, permanently fixing their occupations, interests, associations and aspirations. As men were born so they must remain. Their course of life was prescribed, their places after death predetermined.

Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change. It is indeed important to understand that writer Sivakami used the word change. The word is important because the Indian constitution in the Preamble pledges to secure to all the citizens Justice – social, economic and political, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith of worship, Equality of status and opportunity. Still the Dalits are not recognised by the society, they can't live them selves because of the non - Dalit people who do not accept them as their equals. The Dalits have the power in all the areas but in the name of discrimination still having the fear of rejection. They are forced to hide their identity at all levels because of the caste – ridden society.

A promising young poet from Orissa Basudev Sunani needs no analysis of his poem. He is simple and attracts attention because of his truthful mind set. His poem would bring home to the readers, the poet's wistful wish;

I am thinking of  
 building a house of my own

. . .

and on the wall  
 an oil painting.

Shall I have a painting  
 of a boat in the sea?

. . .

A battle field  
 behind the bullock cart

Where it is written

“Yada yada hi dharmasya.....”

No, these are pictures common to everyone’s walls.

I will have for myself  
 a novel for familiar sight  
 Like the labour Podu Majhi  
 boarding a bus  
 with a tin bin and an aluminum pot  
 on his head  
 to lay bricks  
 and below that just “Podu Majhi”  
 as its title

When at last the historians  
 will excavate this place

. . .  
 In their dissertations  
 the historians will write;  
 It is proved  
 from an ancient oil painting  
 that  
 the people of that time  
 were business like  
 and a Podu Majhi was their leader.(np)

Through all their works these two writers explore the important genres that have a longlasting impact on the people. Sivakami and Iyamam convey their message in a very short space and that too in a much emphatic way. Their novels and their short stories not only voice their angst against the caste system but also provide clues for tackling the problems. One of the most important critiques that have been developed by the Dalit writers has been related to profession. Caste system is a diabolic system that operates through the pre-ordained professions where the profession of a person is decided even before the person is born. The system not only makes slaves out of people, but also strangulates many political talents who are capable of doing much more, but are not allowed to come out of the vicious circle of the caste system. The system has gained life blood from interpretation misinterpretation of the holy texts. One stanza in Bhagvad Gita reads:

Better to do the duty of one's caste  
 Though bad and ill-performed and fraught with evil,  
 Than undertake the business of another

However good it be. Far better far Abandon life at once than not fulfil  
One's own appointed work. (Gita 3, 35)

The existence of Dalits is miserable in the villages where they work from morning to evening and get only food and clothes in return. The social system in the village is set up in such a way that these people have no scope for improvement. The children of these people are not given opportunities to go to school and get education; nor do they get opportunities outside the vicious village economy; but the children have to accompany their parents and help them to do their duties. But in this condition they are willing to educate themselves in all levels in the society. In the novel *Cross Section*, the woman character Saro is a role model in the lower caste society.

“Cooking, washing, office, children, husband, family, giving and taking.  
Isn't this life?

It appeared to her that this is what she and the others had been doing. A sense of emptiness enveloped her. The childhood role playing of father and mother seemed to continue vigorously. She believed that to continue studies was the only meaningful thing in life. Studies, experience of several others, incidents, all these seemed to lengthen her narrow life-span backwards and forwards. History, and questions relating to history, seemed to make her float on a wider canvas.(32)

Sivakami seems to be making a larger point about empowerment, about the learning curve of asserting one's rights in a complex world that's laying out the educational and career possibilities of modernity but that keep place for age old injustices. It is not just in Gowri, who will transcend the helpless of her parent's generation. At the

end of the novel *The Grip of Change*, at her 31<sup>st</sup> year, she got a doctorate degree and a good teaching job.

Gowri's brother Sekaran will conquer the unlucky roll of the dice, but in a different way. Independence will come to him only when he accepts the right of others around him to demand his empathy and respect. "Gowri constantly goaded Kanagavalli and Nagamani with talks of women's liberation. However, both women were used to bending to Kathamuthu's demands. They were happy for Gowri, but felt it was too late for them"(125). Gowri's brother will usher in a new phase of political empowerment. In sharp contrast to Kathamuthu's verandah panchayats, he will seek deeper power sharing with a wider understanding of the political economy by rallying labourers in the local mill to ask for nothing more, or less, than their legitimate rights.

Sivakami in her novel portrays her village, were the overt demarcation of zone of purity and pollution lead to a strong articulation of the status of the Dalits. But once she gains her education and liberation as a woman and ventures to the world outside her village, she finds that caste identity is most often unstated and she must learn to decode gestures and look to know how deeply caste discrimination still operates. In the novel *The Grip of Change* the writer, had achieved a revenge of sorts in her novels. At the end of her novel, she had reduced her father to a counterfeit coin. She had reduced him to an old man reading a newspaper on an easy chair. She and her cousin had been transformed into revolutionaries. Family squabbles made for restricted politics. Bit by bit Sivakami pulls apart the pieces of her novel. It is a disconcerting venture.

Imayam finds his voice in the language which is not recognized by the pundits but is used by the people of the community and through that language he has discovered the

voice of the voiceless. He feels very proud about using the language of his own people. He uses this language as an instrument in bringing about the derived change in Tamil Dalit literature. The grammar of Imayam's language has now become part of the Tamil language. Through his writing, he has found a place for his own community. With his language, he has gained more attention among the readers as much as Sivakami did for her content. Other Dalit writers are amazed at of the language used in his novels like *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*, and they derive their inspiration from him to find their own individual voices.

The condition of the Dalit's in their villages is very poor; they work very hard from morning to evening and get only food and clothes in return. The social system in the village is set up in such a way that they have no space for their development in the society. Even the children have to accompany their parents and help them in doing their duties. In fact, one of the biggest problems of the caste system is that a person's worth is not determined by his ability or his qualification; it is determined by his caste system. In Imayam's novel *Beasts of Burden*, the boy Peter tries to come out from the discriminated village but he can not move from the village because of the condition of his parent's in the village. In the novel *Beasts of Burden*, Peter argues about the change in his mother, in the following manner;

While the younger, Peter, cannot understand why they do not go in for coolie work that would be paid in daily cash wages. At the same time as this loss in main livelihood, there is a steady decline and breakdown in the old caste prerogatives: the amount of grain that Arokkyam and Savuri were allocated by right at each household where they winnowed dwindles

to no more than a single scant tray; . . . Arokkyam has one main hope in coping with change. . . (iii)

In the novel *The Grip of Change*, Gowri openly condemns the inhuman treatment her father inflicted upon Thangam. When Kathamuthu rapes Thangam, Gowri forcefully says: “Dogs! Dogs in this house! Shameless as dogs!”(93). She is also critical of her father’s lawful marital state and always urges her mother Kanagavalli and her step-mother Nagamani for liberation. In fact, Gowri is the mouth piece of Sivakami through whom she has voiced the voiceless Dalit woman who are bearing the inhuman treatment silently. Here the vocalisation and resistance chiefly rests upon the firebrand spirited Gowri.

Poet Dalpat Chauhan hits the caste system below the belt. His poem *Kyan chhe Suraj?* (Where is the Sun). The agony of this shadowless existence is the cry of the Dalit poet. Nimavat in the article “Dalit poetry in Gujrat” in the book *Righting the Wrong: Perspectives on Dalit Studies* while talking about Dalits suffering and agony quotes a poem of Dalpat Chauhan, which expresses a ray of hope.

“You come and stand  
 I also come and stand.  
 One step yours  
 One step mine.  
 Just lift a foot once ! then !  
 Does the earth quake or not ?  
 Does the blood pour or not ?  
 Does the forest roar or not ?  
 Thereafter

A ray of hope for you

A ray of hope for me.” (87)

Sivakami speaks for both men and women and the voice becomes a communal voice, rather than a feminist one. Sivakami and Iyamam have observed that there is a difference between the life of a Dalit man and a woman, even if the woman is educated or not. Since caste is associated with the profession that people take up, the Dalit writers have shown a keen interest in how to transcend the vicious circle of traditional professions associated with caste. In most of their works, the Dalit writers show that education is a passport to a new improved life style, and that it is also a liberator, a powerful weapon against the system that has been followed by society for centuries together. Because they have realized their role and significance of education in their upliftment, the Dalit writers talk about education in their works.

The appeal given by the poet Waman Kardak quoted in the article “Dalit Literature: Some Issues” by Jitender More is worth considering here:

Send my boy to school

Lord and Master

I tell you

Send my boy to school

My boy won't stay stupid or worse

Like that poet Waman's bad verse

My oath on you if there's no school

Send my boy to school, etc. (8)

The poem is an appeal to send the boy to school. Through these lines the poet shows an acute understanding of the situation, the poet knows that if the conditions have to improve, the next generation must go to school. Without educating themselves people cannot change their conditions, they will remain in the same vicious circle where they will have to practice their professions depending upon their caste rather than their birth. They can design their own identity, never listen to the people who talk about the caste system.

Dalit writers touch upon this unjust treatment by the society where people who work hard are forced to remain impoverished. Their oppression and marginalization is drowned by them in liquor which provides them at least a temporary relief. Their voices against humiliation, subjugation, implementation of social justice form the main themes of Dalit literature. The downtrodden, the underdog of the society, the peasant, the factory worker, the fisherman and the scavenger came to the focus'. Writers like Sivakami and Imayam had to carry on a tradition of realist writings and the principles through writing about their own society.

A Dalit's work has its own individuality; similarly the narrative style used to express Dalit tradition also has its own uniqueness. Dalit language is completely different from the other languages used in different regions because the works express the real life of Dalit people. Imayam in his novella *Pethavan: The Begetter* says about his works and their themes in the following manner;

. . . I am a writer. The quality of literary output lies in its authenticity, not in the manner of people who read it. The question why I produced these works is far more important than how I wrote them. I wrote them. I write

because it makes me contemplate society and the human condition.

Writing makes me ponder over social issues with care.

I have certain questions and criticism about the society in which we live, against its psychology, against its social and cultural values, and about its system of justice. This is the substance of all my writings. My intention is to raise questions. Raising questions and the quest for answers form the basis of writing; not providing all answers or conclusions or solutions.

Giving shape to the questions and criticism that lie deep within the recesses of society's conscience and establishing it on the foundations of truth are the essence of my writings. The writer need not talk about, or defend, his writings.(xiv-xiii)

Thus he talks about the way these people lead their lives, struggling with poverty.

Regarding his characters, Iyamam says in the novella *Pethavn: The Begetter*

. . .they live their lives with passion, complete involvement, and to the fullest. They never consider their lives as low or mean and never look upon it with disgust. They never blame anybody for it. Only hearts with desires have these characteristics. The protagonists in my story live their lives. They express themselves in their own language. They convey the story of their lives to me through their tears, through words, and through their songs of lamentation. These have formed the basis of my novels and short stores.(xvii-xviii)

The novel *The Grip of Change* is narrated through the eyes of a young girl, simultaneously thematising Dalitism in order to empower its own identity, and problematise it in order to transcend the inequalities within the Dalit communities. Undoubtedly the rhetorical question of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ is quite relevant to Dalit women’s subalternity too. They can not articulate against the oppression inflicted upon them. The earlier obsession with patriarchal familyfront is now given an exceptionally free spirit to throw away age old seclusion for women to come out in matching spirit with their male counterparts. They are entangled in the servile frame of male patriarchs. Kishwar Naheed comes forward ruthlessly to stop such decadent drumming:

I am not that woman  
selling you socks and shoes!  
Remember me, I am the one you hid  
in your walls of stone, while you roamed  
free as the breeze, not knowing  
that my voice cannot be smothered by stones. (18)

Aswini Kumar Mishra in the article “Voice of Dalit in South Asian Literature” speaks about the spirit of the Dalits. Daud Kamal’s poems are subtle with an inner music of reality. The flowing is a poem, revealing the well-balanced craftsmanship with devotion towards the lower class people in a society. The format of their dreams creep slowly into Dalit women and labourers and their thoughts are exposed through the image of a star:

Dreams accumulate and harden into reality  
Carrion crows

drink from a Main-paddle.

A few steps away

Women labourers carry bricks

on their heads.

Each star

drowns in its own light.

The dreams and wishes are waiting to find their expression. Sivakami's *Cross Section* also portrays the difficulties ordinary Indian woman face in the contemporary Indian culture milieu. Sivakami asks in *Cross Section* "our education, our job, our money, have no doubt increased the comfort [of] our life. How they made us liberated human being"(21)

Sivakami's character Saro in the novel *Cross Section*, defines the combatant spirit of the women. The social oppression of ladies denigrating them all to a broken segment is now challenged through robust feminism revealing that women can write about themselves and their lives. They face all oppressions operated upon false reasons, in their family as well as in the society,

"O Bhagavatar, tell us about the state of equality that lies between the necessity to possess and be possessed."

"The demand for equality itself takes the shape of violence. It disintegrates as man's mind and women's mind."

"Yet, it is inevitable. It makes a dash at the root of violence."

The one, who raised the question to the Bhagavatar, gave the reply too.

The Bhagavatar said that was the end of his discourse and left.(144)

Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains. The deprecating of life is sensitively expressed, in the poem 'The Dahuk' by Farrukh Ahmed through dialogues with a bird.

O bird, tireless  
 Dost thou cry on  
 Thy cry is like the call of freedom  
 Limitless freedom We  
 groan in chains,  
 Insensible of thy strains  
 We lacerate ourselves  
 With our own hands (n.p)

The novel *The Grip of Change* not only voices the plight of an exploited Dalit woman, but also records the waves of change in the Dalit's consciousness by providing a kind of cure for the ailments of the society. The recovery of Dalit's condition is established through the character of Gowri, the ideal of education, Kathamuthu allows his daughter to study and it is only because of this awareness provided by education that she is able to understand the exploitation of women in a patriarchal society.

Since she has tasted the fruits of education, she doesn't want to enter into the bond of marriage early. Moreover she has seen her mother and other women suffer at the hands of her father. Hence she says, "The sufferings that my mother underwent in her marriage! I don't want to be tortured like her by some man"(124). She defies the decision of her father about her marriage by working hard for her examination, and after getting success,

she chooses to study further in the city college. Through Gowri, Sivakami is forced to express the need for an organized, educated, Dalit youth, that stands united by ideological commitment and sincerity of action towards empowerment of Dalits particularly Dalit woman. The text beautifully conveys:

During floods, waters from overflowing wells mingle with the waters of huge water bodies, transgressing their boundaries. Gowri felt that she had crossed over human-made boundaries – her father, her caste and her village – and merged with the ocean of people. But when the rain stops, the floods recede and thorn bushes emerge. Whenever she went back home for the holidays, caste revealed its murderous teeth like an invincible monster. (95).

Sivakami is able to formulate the poignant tale of a woman's struggle to fight and survive in a biased society and culture through her novel *Cross Section*, which suggests that silence and suppression is optimistically replaced by a stimulated and resisting expression. Thus, from beginning to end, this novel serves as an ice breaker and draws attention to, sexual assaults, psychological torments and economical exploitation along with a message that a democratic approach is essential to eradicate such discriminatory ideologies from the life of women in the family and society. Sivakami brings out the argument that ensues between Saro and Ravi when she tries to leave the house unable to put up with the treatment of her husband Ravi.

He tried to gag her mouth and choke her.

“*Chee*, don't touch me, take your hands off.”

She screamed out at a high pitch, her voice bursting out in shrills. She was not herself. He, too, transformed himself to match her.

She tried to bite his fingers. He gave a whack on her face to control her, but she very nearly collapsed. She got up somehow and tried to strike back. She bit his hands and tore him with her nails.(110)

Sivakami and Imayam in their writings were impelled by various motivations that include liberal individualism, quest for freedom, religious conversion, and oppositional self- representation. When the Dalit writers felt the need to express themselves, they could only turn inward and talk about their own experiences. Autobiography thus became a fitting vehicle for this expression. And the portrayal of the life of a Dalit individual was representative of an entire community. Similarly, both these writers works became a representative account of their Tamil Dalit community.

The first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman, *The Grip of Change* evoked a great deal of discussion because it went beyond condemning caste fanatics by using fiction to describe how people are shackled, and tangled among themselves. Instead of being the journey of her individual voice and consciousness, it was a unanimous expression of the youth of this oppressed community eager and waiting for change. The novel *The Taming of Women* not only voices the plight of an exploited Dalit woman, but also records the waves of change that is present in the Dalit consciousness, thus providing a kind of cure for the ailments given by the male dominated society through the character of Periyannan. In this context Lakshmi at one point of view rejects Periyannan when he came to her to satisfy his physical need,

‘Do not touch me,’ Lakshmi screamed in a strangely wild tone.

Periyannan came running in. Lakshmi sat with her fingers plaited together, her back stiff and her eyes closed.

‘Lakshmi,’ he said as he neared her. Suddenly, she opened her eyes, rolled them and shut them again. He sprang back, scared; but he didn’t want to show that before Anandhayi, so he shouted, can’t you see that my mother has possessed her? Go get the camphor and offer it to her!’(212)

In the novel *Beasts of Burden* writer Iyayam suggests remedies to ameliorate the condition of the Dalit women. Women are the victims in the patriarchal society. Owing to poverty, ignorance and lack of education, they are denied their rights in politics, education and in every sphere of human activities. So the novelist conveys that the Dalits should put in efforts to protect themselves and establish that they are also human beings like others. When Sahayam marries Joseph she tries to change all his attitude towards life.

Sahayam had a habit of combing her hair frequently. Of gazing at her reflection in the mirror for a long time, as if it was only possible to tidy herself up in front of it. She ate very little, now and then, like a bird. She slept during the day. She told Mary the stories of film she had seen, and taught her the songs. Arokkyam would pick on any one of these things. A quarrel would then ensue as if between lifelong enemies.

‘Do you think it’s enough for you to look after yourself, and make sure you are all smart and shimmering? There’s a life to be lived, you know. Is the mirror going to teach you to survive? Is it going to show you anything that isn’t there, after all?’ (78-79)

Imayam's novels and all his works are based on the Dalits and are addressed to the Dalits, so they are more down to earth and realistic than other protest novels. Dalit's writings attempt to reconstruct the 'histories from below' or recover the experiences of those who have been hitherto hidden from the history. The word, 'abject' marks out a landscape of feeling by and about women that places them below and beyond culture – almost outside what can be represented within it. Women have always been dependent on men, they all treat them like slaves. Though the situation is beginning to change, women's legal status is nowhere the same as that of and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Prabhakar Bangurde in his poem "*Comrade*" expresses his wish to the people in the society.

Zakir Abedi in his book contemporary *Dalit Literature: Quest for Dalit Liberation* quotes a poem by Prabhakar Bangurde.

Don't be in a hurry for revolution.  
 You are still very small.  
 Your ability to resist  
 the atrocities, boycotts and rapes  
 that go on every moment  
 has become nil  
 comrade  
 Tomorrow's sun is yet to rise  
 sleep undisturbed until then . . . (10)

The Dalit writers explore and expose the exploitation and subjugation of the Dalits communities respectively to find that all forms of exploitation are identical because they

are applied against the only object, human being. But they want to remind the world that the basic problem is restoration of man to his proper place. They voice their problem or write about the atrocities committed upon them to assert their identity and they make a step towards the centre thereby assuming cultural stability. Most of the writings of the Dalits in India fall into the genre of resistance literature. They contain an analysis of the social problems like racism, casteism, inequality, suppression and exploitation followed by the agenda of political change. In Sivakami's novel *Cross Section* the character Saro's views are different from the other women in the society. She always raises her voice in the dominant area. The conversation between Saro and her friend Bhagyavathi brings out this:

“How can I decide anything? All my grievance is that conflicts and quarrels have become a regular feature of my life.”

“Saro, I swear. I can't understand what you are talking about. He has a relationship with some other woman. From the way you talk it seems there is nothing wrong about his moving around with the other woman. You want separation; but wish to have his friendship. Why do want a friendship with someone who has betrayed you? Let him first cut off his association with her.”

“ . . . ”

“Why are you silent?”

“I'm thinking, ‘What is home?’, ‘What is family?’”

“Don't be a coward! Don't be afraid of anything. You must create enough trouble for her so that she leaves him on her own. You just say yes, what are we friends here for? (19)

The aim of marginalized literature is to record the cruel experiences and to establish the driving quest for integrity and identity. Their writings demand civil and human rights, destruction of hegemony and the active reconstruction of interrupted and interpreted histories. Imayam points out in *Arumugam* how the society thinks and treats Dalit People. The woman character Chinnapponnu scolds Dharmamoorthy when he tries to control her.

She spat on his face, frenzied. “Get out yourself, da. I curse and abuse you right and left and you still haunt this place! Haven’t you any self- respect? How dare you talk to me like that? Yei, am I your wife? Who’re you to me, and who am I to you, da? Who’re you to come in here and lay down rules? Look at this fellow’s face, just like a vulgar konkaani ... get lost, da!”(116)

Black and Dalit women rarely go out of the city limits and so their experiences are very limited. Once women like Sula of *Sula* and Gowri of *The Grip of Change* come out of the family as rebels, there are certain things they have to attend to and their response would be rejection- the rejection of social standards, values and the traditional way of life. In the novel *The Grip of Change*, Gowri finds that the society is subverting towards equality and she becomes aware of “. . . The ground beneath his [her father’s] feet . . . shaking. Earthquakes were emanating and floods were rising to change the very structure of the world” (126). Gowri, as the new ship has imbibed the consciousness of change and Sivakami’s subaltern voice conveys the significance of the grip of change through the withered, blooming, and budding jasmine flowers:

The jasmine bush hadn't been plucked for days. Withered flowers littered the ground. The flowers that had bloomed that day were spreading their heady fragrance. Tightly closed new buds hung in bunches at the tip of every branch. Recognition of the life force in nature coursed through Gowri. She stood there, rooted by the thrill of awareness.(127)

The thrill of awareness extols Sula and Gowri, the new emancipated women. The subaltern voices of Toni Morrison and Sivakami soar to lofty altitudes and echo Alice Walker's: *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. "The white man's oppression of me will not excuse my oppression of you, whether you are man, child, animal or three because the self that I prize refuses to be owned By him. Or by anyone"(345)

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)

Sivakami's character Gowri in *The Grip of Change*, voices her deeper sense in the process of her self-discovery. She tries to encourage Dalit women to stand up and fight for their rights. It is also a celebration of strength of women. It is not simply a story of moaning but a story of motivation and pride to the Dalit women. Dalit literature involves the subaltern voice of the women, they are marginalized three fold on the basis of caste, class and patriarchy. The condition of the Dalit women of these marginalized sections are more painful in which they offer an instance of triple marginalization. Marginalization is when a person is pushed to the edge of [the] society, and discrimination is when he is made to stand out.

Empowerment is thus envisaged through women's ability to negotiate, strategise, manipulate, and rebel against events, situations and persons in their everyday lives in the family and in the workplace. Conflicts, compliance and resistance are central to women's lives irrespective of whether they are able to give expression to their desire and views. Both within and outside the family, women engage in the twin processes of compliance and resistance, submission and rebellion, silence and speech to assert their identities as women in what they clearly recognize as oppressive relationship and situations. Acts of resistance are linked to the possibilities of change without always attaining them, yet it is in these very acts that there is the possibility of openness and change. It is in acknowledgment of this historical responsibility that Meena Kandasamy declares in an undated interview:

The annihilation of caste is a historic necessity, and at the same time, it is a historic inevitability as well. So, I am sure that it is a dream that I share with thousands of others. I think that such a change can come about only through a social revolution . . . And I think it is in the hands of writers to

make people think about it. Writers have the power of the written word, and they can plead with people to unite for change. (3-4)

With the change of time Dalit women are also facing new challenges. With more and more rural areas coming under the spell of modernization projects, technology is replacing human labours. Dalit women are the immediate victims of this process. Earlier, the Dalit men used to migrate far away to earn their livelihood. Not being able to get regular jobs in villages, Dalit women also have started migrating to nearby urban areas with their family members. In towns and cities even though they get regular employment they are physically harassed by their employers. They also feel alienated because they can hardly cope with the city culture. Sivakami's and Iyayam's novels *The Taming of Women* and *Beasts of Burden* end with the second generation who start their life out of their village. They want to move out of their villages, so as to get their education and dignity. But as days go by everything has changed.

The days passed. The lime tree had fruits, but these were not sour enough. . . the next town was now a taluk. The place where Periyannan's house was located was now very important. He had sold off all land along the highway and made a handsome bargain. He also had a shop that sold cement and steel. Mani and Anbu worked full-time for him – under his oppression, of course, knowing full well that any rebellion meant no money. (247)

During the independent movement women from all castes and classes joined the freedom struggle. Indian leaders mobilized women and asked for their active participation. Later, the freedom movement had some women leaders who became

leaders of the masses. In spite of the emergence of these women leaders the Indian freedom movement continued to remain male-dominated. The male leaders of the movement did raise the issue of emancipation of women. But they put all the issues related to women in a common basket treating them as a homogeneous group. As a result specific issues related to Dalit women never got highlighted.

Dalit literature not only voices the trials and tribulations of the community but also tries to give the solutions to the problems. Earlier Dalit literatures were being written in regional languages and remained obscure to the people who did not speak the languages, but now translation has increased the reach of Dalit literature. Now the translation has not only enabled the people living in different regions of the country, but has also allowed the writers to discuss the problems of their people. However, the writings of women from the East and the West, and, especially the subversive writings, initiate a comparison, which is relevant to the immediate social needs of the people to be aware of the power and value of literatures of other cultures. The possibility of creating and comparing the subversive literatures creates a sense of cultural superiority. No national literature and no single literature, however rich, is rich enough to present the highest literary achievements of man.

Imayam offers multiple voices within the ravings of the abused women in order to foreground the Dalit's condition in the novel *Arumugam*. Arumugam's anguished voice narrating his trouble is a personal one. The reference to their local god, who will, he believes, avenge his humiliation, is the mythic voice. The historical voice is subsumed into these two when Arumugam expresses the poor Dalit's inability to live with dignity in the society. The voices and three contexts are set out for us: the personal, the historical-social and mythic.

Sivakami's novel *Cross Section* brings different images of a Dalit woman and heralds a positive identity to her who has so long been negated and discarded on the fringes of the society. Through the character Saro she tries to rebuild the tarnished self image of the Dalit women.

It is a journey of the Dalits towards re-building their self esteem, from the feeling of a sense of shame at being born a Paraiyar to a sense of pride and confidence in their breed. It has succeeded in expressing a consciousness so long suppressed. Every imaginable burden overweighs the shoulders of the Dalit women, Sivakami through the character Saro expresses the different attitude of women in the contemporary society who are living under the pressures of the male- dominated society. As for the Dalit women the book *Cross Section* definitely calls for a revolution and the need for empowerment through education and introspection.

Sivakami first discovers her voice in her novel *The Grip of Change* and establishes her level as a Dalit writer. She finds out a voice and identity for her community among others in Tamil society. Through the women characters it becomes the collective voice of the community. She wants her community to be recognized and liberated both in body and in mind; the voice of the women in her society is heard when they after all their sufferings try to raise their voice against them. So in her works she focuses on the atrocities against the women within her society and fights for the liberation of the entire community. Sivakami's promised land beyond this life of bondage and oppression with its powerful and convincing and life affirming testimonies of human endurance is not far away. To the millions of Dalit women who suffer by the patriarchal society, here is the gospel of freedom that helps them come out of their existential

subordination and a trauma. In her novel *Sangati*, Bama also talks about the need to be indomitable. She says,

We must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence [ . . . ] we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged, and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive.(59)

Imayam uses the language of his own people, thus breaking the rules of grammar and vocabulary of the Tamil language. In the novel *Beasts of Burden* the exclusive narrative language is used as a tool to find the voice of the voiceless, the tone and effect of the language although slightly fall short of the poetic original are not completely lost. The Dalit writers come with various experiences in their life in the Tamil society. As they bring out the change in their people, the book resists the temptation to isolate memories as either controlled by family life or as expressions of a purely psychic state. Nirav Patel has written about the change that would come. He points out with a prophetic note that the wheel of time has come a full circle in one of his poems which is quoted by Nimavat. In the book *Righting the Wrong*,

A Valmiki has become a vice-chancellor,  
A chamarin has become the Queen of Ayodhya,  
The king of the country is Dalit Narayan,  
Wheel of time has come full circle. (91)

Imayam illustrates in his works how Dalit women of three generations face physical violence, sexual assault, exploitation both at homes and outside. He brings out

incidents of honour killing, quoting examples of the Kannagi- Murugesan pair, who were killed a decade ago. *Pethavan: The Begetter* talks how Bakkiyam's father helps her to escape from the village with Periyasamy, even through it costs him his life.

‘What route will you take?’ he asked, giving Kanakaraj the phone.

‘It is now four. I'll take her on the bike to Vizhuppuram, where I will put her on a bus. From there it will take three hours to reach Madras. She will be able to get home by seven or eight.’

‘Right, then set off! Get going, Drive carefully. Inform your little sister as soon as you reach.’ Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him and he quickly untied the silver cord that he wore around his waist and gave it to her. Bhakkiyam pressed her face to his chest, and, like a little child, embraced him tightly and wailed.(51-52)

Sivakami has abundant courage and zest, and she has been working single-mindedly for the liberation of Dalits. As an empowered woman she was able to overcome her pain, agony and default with indefatigable and extraordinary mental strength. Her dream is to change the society. She wants to create a just society where all equal and no one should enslave others. Sivakami urges the Dalits to be bold enough to bring about a constructive change in society.

Dalit feminism seems to encourage the Dalit women to use a sharp tongue and obscene words as their effective protectional cover from the patriarchy in the society. Dalit women and girls work to keep the families from going empty stomached to bed. It is the poorest of the poor women who toil from morning to evening and work hard. In the novel *Sangati*, the narrator tells,

We must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence. I told myself that we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged, and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive.(59)

In many parts of India Dalits especially Dalit women have tried to fight their losing battle for their rights. From independence to till date they have been facing many problems in the male dominated society; landless people borrow land from landlords with many terms and conditions. Nowadays Dalits are often aware of their rights that are given by government and the laws. Dalit women are doubly oppressed as they are exploited by the upper caste and also by the men of their own community. In this novel some of the women live a submissive life while some other women raise their voice against the oppressive discrimination. Meena Kandasamy in *Touch* says,

Give me the clothes,  
 Rather,  
 Give me the clothes  
 To wear and wrap over my  
 Twenty-one-year-old naked heart.  
 To heal old wounds, the armors to win wars  
 Give me the clothes  
 That shall call home  
 Our exiled culture...  
 We'll sweat in spun fabric dreams

Freedom in form triumphing over  
Enslaved bodies and chained minds.(133)

Oppressed, ruled and still being ruled by patriarchy, government, caste, and religion, Dalit women are forced to break all the strictures of society to live on their own. The growth of Dalit and the concept of identity mirrored the dynamic system of the Dalit literary movement. In that movement they try to expand to more defined beauty and a more robust counter ideology and it continuously added to these developments to its understanding of Dalit. Dalit, the term simply maintained its original adjectival meaning applied to persons and communities broken, crushed and ground down by casteism and economic exploitation. The Dalit's lack active voice in their life, the movement has quickly remedied this passivity with an injection of agency.

The image of empowerment is reinforced through the joint assertion of common identity as their life in the discriminated society. But when it comes to literature, Dalits revolution has already been sowed and in the in the days to come people will be more aware of their rights which they were deprived for centuries. The Novel *The Grip of Change* is an expression of the Dalit youth eager to make and working for change. Sivakami empowers the Dalits especially, the women who under the discriminated society try to overcome the social evil,

The jasmine bush hadn't been plucked for days. Withered flowers littered the ground. The flowers that had bloomed that day were spreading their heady fragrance. Tightly closed new buds hung in bunches at the tip of every branch. Recognition of the life force in nature coursed through Gowri. She stood there, rooted by the thrill of awareness.(127)

If the Dalit women have achieved anything, it is through Dalit consciousness rising; this has to raise the new breezes blowing in the country, so as to reconstruct the society for the discriminated people at the economical and educational levels. The novels and other works of these writers highlight the continued and unabated oppression of Dalits. On the one hand they depict their development and on the other the changing life style of the people. In Imayam's novel *Beasts of Burden*, the second generation of Arokkyam's family comes out of their village and develop their life style;

As for Josep, as soon as he went to Chinnasalem, he cut his hair.

Arokkyam had been shocked when she heard he had grown a moustache.

At first she wept at the news, as if her whole family had been ruined. She railed against Sahayam, who, she believed, was behind everything that was changing and spoiling the family. What had she not instigated? Everything has changed because of her. When Arokkyam first entered this house as a daughter-in-law, all the vessels and jars were earthenware . . .

Sahayam arrived. Everything changed. From plates, tumblers, chembus, serving spoons and strainers, everything in her possession was in stainless steel . . .(290-91)

In Sivakami's *Cross Section* different social situations have been discussed and portrayed. These Dalits have to struggle hard to acquire anything, face inferior treatment from the people and exploited by other people especially the Dalit women in their family and society for their own benefits. She rises to distinction from her marginalized presence and her voice is recognized as an authorized voice of an author who works on behalf of Dalits. Sivakami herself describes from her individual experience the troubles of the

Dalits who even have no right to fight for education and their basic needs. Saro's story is a voice from the Dalit women in the society that has remained voiceless for countless generations together. Through her activity in her family and from the attitude her husband has towards her, it can be surmised that Saro is not a person to be intimidated. Her husband Ravi wonders,

She seemed to insult him by feigning to have forgotten to speak to him.

She's so arrogant because she is earning! The matter is not so simple for it to be simply set aside and for her to sleep peacefully, is it? Is it possible for her to be patient and generous? She should cry bitterly for even small matters as though she has lost something. She should fight. How dare she ignore me and sleep soundly? Is there a place to retreat to? Without leaving words behind? She certainly couldn't have gone alone. Has she become totally estranged from me?(44-45)

Things have changed so much between them that both feel that it is difficult to renew old ties. It is very clear that people of her generation will not put up with the atrocities of the male – dominated world. In Imayam's *Arumugam*, the character Chinnaponnu acts, because she realises that speaking alone will not help them

Chinnaponnu stepped down from the rickshaw, and kicked Dharmamoorthy from behind. Before he could turn around and gather his wits, she kicked him between his legs. Dharmamoorthy collapsed wordlessly, clutching his groin. Pushing him down flat on the ground, Chinnaponnu sat on his chest and pummelled his face relentlessly; only

when her hands began to throb with pain did she stop. Gasping for breath, she spat a “Chi, thooma,” in his face, and then looked up.(139)

The time has come when people have to act. With the awareness, education and unity they will be able to show their resistance through their actions.