

Chapter-III

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Chinna Rao Yagati in his book *Dalits' Struggle For Identity* talks about Jashua a Dalit poet who has learnt his lessons of his life as a Dalit. He reflected;

‘He reflected that ‘life taught me many lessons. I have two Gurus, i.e. poverty and caste. If one taught me patience (inability in the initial stage) the other increased my power of resistance. But it did not convert me into a slave. I intend to pierce through caste destruction, poverty and prove that I am a human being. I wield a sword, i.e. my poetry. It has no hatred against society but against its policy’. In his poetry, the anger, agony, disgust and misery of the Dalit masses, their bitter experience of every form of exploitation were represented with authenticity.’(212)

India's social structure is different from other nations because of Indian caste system which can be described as an elaborately stratified social hierarchy. Caste is a term, which specifies a group of people having a specific social rank. The beginning of the caste system is found in different theories. There are the mystical and religious theories. There are biological theories and socio-historical theories also. The religious theories explain how the four Varnas were founded, though they do not explain how the Jats in each Varna or the untouchables were founded. The hymn quoted by the writer Darshana Trivedi, in the article “Literature of Their Own: A Critical Survey of Gujarati Dalit Literature” in the book *Multicultural Literature in India Critical Perception* Volume-I point outs, the origin of the caste systems:

Brahmnoasaya mukhamasit

Bahu rajanayah kruta

Uru tadasay yadvaaishya

Padabhayam sudro ajayat(21)

The earliest expression of caste can be found in one of India's vast bodies of religious scriptures known as the Vedas, which are thought to have been compiled between 1500 and 1000 B.C. The Rig Veda contains one of the most famous sections in ancient Indian literature according to which the first man created, Purusa, is sacrificed in order to give rise to the four varnas. The different varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmans were created from his head; the Kshatrias from his hands; the Vaisias from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. Another religious theory claims that the varnas were created from the body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world.

The biological theory claims that all existing things whether animate or inanimate have three qualities inherent in them in different proportions. Sattva qualities include wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness and other positive qualities. Rajas include qualities like passion, pride, valour and other passionate qualities. Tamas qualities include dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity and other negative qualities. People with different doses of these inherent qualities adopted different kinds of occupation. According to this theory Sattva qualities are inherent in the Brahmans; Kshatrias and Vaisias have Rajas qualities. And the Sudras are inherent of Tamas qualities.

Food and also its different dosages affect the qualities of human beings as well as the eater's intelligence. The Brahmans and the Vaisias have Sattvic diet which includes

fruits, milk, honey, roots and vegetables. Most of the meats are considered to have Tamasic qualities. Many Sudra communities eat different kinds of meat (but not beef) and other Tamasic food. But the Kshatrias who had Rajasic diet eat some kinds of meat like deer which is considered to have Rajasic qualities. Many Marathas who claim to be Kshatrias eat mutton. The drawback of this theory is that in different parts of India the same food was sometimes qualified to have different dosage of inherent qualities. For example, there are Brahmans who eat meat which is considered Tamasic food.

The social historical theory explains the creation of the varnas, Jats and of the untouchables. According to this theory, the caste system began with the arrival of the Aryans in India. The Aryans arrived in India around 1500 BC. The fair skinned Aryans arrived in India from south Europe and north Asia. Before the Aryans, there were other communities in India of other origins, among whom Negrito, Mongoloid, Austroloid and Dravidian were a few. The Negrito have physical features similar to people of Africa. The Mongoloid have Chinese features. The Austroloids have features similar to the aboriginals of Australia. The Dravidians originated from the Mediterranean and they were the largest community in India. When the Aryans arrived in India, their main contact was with the Dravidians and the Austroloids. The Aryans disregarded the local cultures and began conquering and taking control over regions in north India and at the same time drove the local people southwards or towards the jungles and mountains in north India.

The Aryans organized themselves into three groups. The first group of people were called Rajayana who were warriors; later they changed their name Rajayana to Kshatria. The second group was that of the priests and they were called Brahmans. These two groups struggled politically for leadership and the Brahmans got to be the leaders of the Aryan society. The third group was the farmers and craftsmen and they were called Vaisias. The

Aryans who conquered and took control over parts of north India by subduing the locals, made them their servants. In this process the Vaisias who were the farmers and craftsmen became the landlords and the businessmen and local became the peasants and craftsmen of the society. In order to secure their status, the Aryans resolved some social and religious rules which allowed them to be priests, warriors and businessmen of the society.

The skin colour was considered an important factor in the caste system. The meaning of the word 'varna' refers to the skin colour not class or status. Between the outcasts and the three Aryan Varnas is the Sudra Varna who are the simple workers of the society. The Sudras consisted of two communities. One community was the locals who were subdued by the Aryans and the other the descendants of Aryans with locals. In India, as in most of the societies of the world, the son inherited his father's profession. And so in India there developed families, who took up the same family profession for generations in which, the son, continued his father's profession. Later on when these families became larger, they were seen as communities or as they are called in Indian languages, Jat. Different families who professed the same profession developed social relations between them and organized themselves as a common community, meaning Jat. Later on the Aryans who created the caste system, added to their system non-Aryans. Different Jats who professed different professions were integrated according to their profession in different varnas. Other foreign invaders of ancient India like - Greeks, Huns, Scythians and others - who conquered parts of India and extended their kingdoms were integrated into the Kshatria Varna (warrior caste). But probably the Aryan policy was not to integrate original Indian communities within them and hence many aristocratic and warrior communities that were in India before the Aryans did not get the Kshatria status.

Alok Mukherjee in the article “Reading Sharan Kumar Limbale’s *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: From Erasure to Assertion*” quotes Limbale’s definition which includes all the dispossessed and oppressed of India;

Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits. The term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes. In Explaining the word, it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be

Included.(11)

The basic function of caste system is hierarchization of power; therefore ‘untouchability’ and ‘identity’ are discourses that cannot go together because one negates the other. Dalit men through various ways try to appropriate identity and they are to fight tooth and nail untouchability itself. Dalit women’s case is all the more problematical. They are doubly marginalized, marginalized as Dalits in relation to the ‘upper castes’ of the society on the one hand and within the Dalit themselves because of patriarchy and the other. This chapter explores how Dalit women’s discourse of difference is formed and the situation of double marginalization is developed by a critical analysis of two fictional texts written by Sivakami.

The caste system also mentions about gender inequality and untouchability in the case of the Dalits in India. The ‘untouchables’ are seen to be a source of pollution and hence are carefully excluded from all aspects of social life. Where Dalit women are concerned, they face multiple jeopardy at the hands of men, not only of upper caste but also

of lower caste. Dalit women face sexual harassment from the upper caste landlords for whom they work and also from the patriarchs of their own society. Thangam in *The Grip of Change* says, "I belong to the Hindu scheduled caste community. I am a poor Parayar, and orphan, a widow. I earn my living by working for a daily wage"(11) It is a known fact that the Dalits fit into the lower rung of the hierarchy in the Indian society. The caste Hindus consider them unapproachable and untouchable. In the past days they were addressed by different names. They were called 'Milechas' and 'Chandalas' in the vedic time, 'achchuta' in the medieval time and 'exterior caste' during the British rule. But in the Indian constitution they are mentioned as "Scheduled Caste" shortened to SC. Narayan in his book, *Life Left Overs* says, "The term Dalits however, served to unite the group by including all the lower castes under one common umbrella" (38). Mahatma Gandhi replaced the term 'untouchables' with "Harijans" meaning "God's people." Within their own caste, they have internal hierarchies as the pallar, parayar and chakkiliyar and quarrelled among themselves.

The wide range of nomenclatures used or attributed to Dalits speaks for their socially known disabilities irrespective of the law enacted for their protection and welfare. A study of the Indian Society enumerates the widely known disability of the Dalits as social, economic, political, religious and educational. What S.Lourduathan in his book *Dalit Liberation Discourse* says about Dalits or outcaste is worth mentioning here; "the people who are deprived of humanity, who are insulted of the divinity in man and who suffer various forms of untouchability, according to the Indian tradition are known as the *outcaste*"(24). Sivakami in her novel *The Grip of Change* through her character Kathamuthu talks about the disabilities the Dalit experience in the following manner: " ' I still remember,' 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 Dalits are subjected to. The Dalits portrayed in the novels *The Taming of Women* and *The Grip of Change* too are deprived of all basic needs like food, clothes and shelter. Others will not lend them anything. A nadar girl tells Gowri in *The Grip of Change* "My mother says we can't lend you a dhavani. You belong to the Parayar caste..."(161). The Dalits in the North live in *Bastis* and in South India they live in *Cheri*. "In Puliur, the village and the cheri were almost joined. Perhaps it was those few tamarind trees positioned in between them that kept them apart." (25) In both the novels the writer gives a vivid picture of the isolation of the Dalits from the higher caste people even in issues related to the dwellings of the Dalit which makes them socially disabled. "Tamarind tree" in *The Grip of Change* marks the residential area of the Dalit people.

The lower caste men, women and children irrespective of their age are subjected to shame. They are eternally made to live at the mercy of the upper castes. Dalits are considered to be things for use. Even though Kathamuthu and Naicker moved with each other in a friendly manner and maintained their relationship and both seemed to enjoy the company of each other, still Naicker was quite conscious of his caste. His indirect exhibition of his caste consciousness irritated Kathamuthu. Once someone brought to the notice of Kathamuthu, what Naicker commented about him: " 'poor fellow, he belongs to a lower caste. Can't you tell from his gross speech?' "(18). This comment of Naicker hurt the feelings of Kathamuthu. One of Kathamuthu's relatives who bought silver Arignan for his newborn baby from Naickar jewellery shop, complained to Kathamuthu about the

behaviour of Naicker when he went to his shop. Kathamuthu understood from the relative that, “Naicker kept him standing, and carefully dropped the silver piece on his palm from a distance in order to avoid touching him. The relative had promptly complained to Kathamuthu. “The following day, Kathamuthu showed up at Naicker’s store. ‘Why are you touching me Naicker? Isn’t it a sin if you touch me?’ asked Kathamuthu provocatively”(19). True to the studies conducted by the sociologists, untouchability is carried out to such an absurd length in South India that abolition of it is still evading us. How the upper caste dominates the lower caste society and how it torments the lower caste people physically and mentally are clearly revealed in the literature of the Dalits.

Sivakami too makes a mention of the student’s lives in her novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* with the young daughters of Kathamuthu and Periyannan as her focal point. But before that it is also to be understood that not all the opportunities to be educated are used by them. Kathamuthu, the self styled leader of the Paraiyars in Puliur told the inspector about Thangam. “Sir, I am not educated like you. I have just studied till class three. There after my mother had to leave as a bonded labourer in an upper caste household. I tended their cattle . . . ” (22). This is the condition of Dalit children in the society; but gifted Dalit children like Gowri get their education and prove their mettle, and try hard to rise higher from the dust of discomfiture. In spite of the education she got, Gowri was wounded by the remarks of a student belonging to a backward caste. Gowri asked the student who was returning after getting her scholarship money,

‘How much did you get?’

‘For you, it is different, ‘the girl replied.

‘Aren’t you from a Scheduled caste?’ Gowri enquired doubtfully.

‘nonsense! I am a Vanniyakula Kshatriya.’

‘If you are not from a Scheduled caste, just say so! Why do you have to

prefix

a ‘nonsense’? (95)

Despite all these difficulties in life Gowri rose above all the other members of her community through her education. Her empowerment comes through her education.

A.S.Gangane has quoted Mahatma Phule poem in his article “The Narrative of the Native: Marathi Short Story Past and Present”, first volume of the book *Multicultural Literature in India: Critical Perceptions*, which talks about the disasters caused by the lack of education:

for want of education intellect was lost,

for want of intellect morality was lost,

for want of morality dynamism was lost,

for want of dynamism wealth was lost,

for want of wealth the Sudras were degraded (demoralized)

lac [lack]of education (avidya) has caused all these disasters.(119)

The Dalit people in both novels are disabled economically too. Regarding the **economical** disabilities of these people, Sharma says, “The disability of the Harijians were **not restricted** only to the social sphere but extended to the economic sphere too. Due to **their social** disabilities they could not retain any interest in or enthusiasm for their

occupation”(78). The same idea is found in Valmiki who says in *Joothan*, “The financial situation of the family was very bleak. Each member of the family had to work very hard for the sake of a few paise”(33). Sivakami throws light on the horrible economic condition of the Dalits in Puliur in the following conversation in *The Grip of Change* brings out their plight:

He paused and continue, ‘A few days ago, a women was whipped by upper caste

men in this village. They set fire to the cheri_’

Ramalinga Reddiar and Arunachala Reddiar protested, ‘We will swear in any

temple, we are not responsible for the fire.’

Kathamuthu disgruntled at the interruption, said, ‘Tahsildar sir, I have not

finished yet.’

The tahsildar looked at Paranjothi Udayar, who in turn silenced the Reddiars with

a glare.

‘ I am coming to the point. In Athur as well as the surrounding villages, a labourer gets five to six rupees for planting paddy. And that’s only from eight in the morning to one in the afternoon. But here, labourers begin as early as seven in the morning and work till evening falls. Yet, they get only three rupees.’ (68)

The labourers in Puliur demanded more wages. But the Udayars and Reddiars and the upper caste men used all possible means to overpower them. Even when the Dalits moved to different places in search of a better life, not all turned out to be successful.

There is political disability also which is revealed through the novels. Sivakami vividly describes the way a typical Panchayat functions through these lines:

A petromax lamp was brought to the large tamarind tree located between the village and the cheri. Some string cots and benches were carried out from the upper caste houses. Chairs were brought from Paranjothi's house. The rich upper caste men sat on the benches on one side. Lower caste men and women stood about forty feet away from them. Pichapillai, Sellamuthu and a few other cheri elders sat on the roots of the tamarind tree. The tahsildar and the inspector sat on the chairs. When they signalled the lower caste men to come closer, the latter on answered that they were waiting for Kathamuthu.(64)

Even though the country proudly talks about its democratic structure, caste discrimination is still prevalent in the society. Sivakami mentions about it in *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*. Though Kathamuthu and Periyannan were the self styled leaders of the Pariyars in Puliur and Athur, they had their voice only within their community. The social and economic conditions did not allow them to pursue education though education could have given only a little more to them in their status. Gowri, Kathamuthu's daughter avidly pursued education and proved her abilities. She faces all challenges boldly to rise higher and higher from the ashes of discomfiture. Thus through these two novels Sivakami underscores the "issues of dalit identity, caste-gender discourse

in contemporary Tamil society. . .”(11), says Mangalam in her review of *The Grip of Change*.

All these issues make one ponder that in India which is a developing nation, what people are doing in the name of caste and religion is indeed quite reprehensible. Should the Indian society not do its utmost to uplift the suppressed Dalits? Should the Dalits not be relieved of all the discussed disabilities? It is time they become united forgetting the small and insignificant differences among themselves and work for their betterment. They should join hand with their neighbours irrespective of the caste they belong to and strive towards building a Caste-Free and United India.

The former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh said that any nation which treats women as equal to men can hold its head high:

No nation, no society, no community

Can hold its head high and claim to be

Part of the civilized world if it condones

The practice of discriminating against one

half of humanity represented by women.

The origin of this gender inequality is always in the male ego. Because of this gender inequality, all opportunities are open to men and women are always relegated to the secondary position, whether it is education or employment etc. Even women were for this gender inequality in the early days. It is evident in women's claim 'May God gives son to all': However, Women started fighting with their husbands and their family for their

equality, because caste subjugation is overlaid with gender subjugation. Sivakami hints at the gender discrimination in her novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* as she portrays the basic problems in the society and how this gender discrimination is present in the caste oriented society. When one reads Sivakami's novels he would be able to feel that very concrete pang that comes from connecting to these characters. In *The Grip of Change*, because Gowri was a female as well as a Dalit, the marginalization that was inflicted on her is twofold. Kapoor Mini in the review of the *The Grip of Change* "*Splintering the Novel*" says:

But Kathamuthu is also a patriarch who seeks to completely control the women in his life. There are three of them: his two wives, Kanagavalli and Nagamani, and his almost grown daughter, Gowri. Thangam will be fourth women in the household, the money she gains as compensation from her upper caste oppressors as well as her inheritance retrieved from her relatives fasten her with Kathamuthu. The three women, having worked through . . . competitive posturing, finally find common cause in a patriarchal set-up they have made peace with, even as they have learned to fight caste-based inequality. Gowri, however, is a silent observer, never able to stop herself from flinching at Kathamuthu's authoritarianism or his disregard of the consequences of his vulgarity.(6)

When girls of her age wore different dresses Gowri could not think of such things as her male chauvinist father did not care about her dresses and she longed for good clothes. However, she used to be very neat even with what she had. "She wore a faded blue dhavani. She wore it every day, even on holidays when she had to work in the plaintain grove or gather firewood. It had a few holes. But she wore it neatly, hiding them within the

folds”(161). She felt bad that her father wasted his money on unnecessary things. Her anger came out in the following manner as she gave an outlet to her feelings, “She ranted at her mother, ‘Your husband has the money to drink and sleep around with women, but he can’t spare some for a dhavani? He has fathered a house full of children, why can’t he die instead of putting us to such shame? I can’t even borrow a piece of cloth because of my caste! I want to kill myself!’”(162).

In the novel Gowri’s experiences in school are not much documented but the disturbances in the family and their impact on the student were brought out clearly. She had been observing the happenings quietly never silencing her judgments and was forced to own her inequality along two axes, caste and gender.

Sivakami opened the novel *The Taming of Women*, as Anandhayi gave birth to her child downstairs, when her husband Periyannan slept with another woman upstairs. When she was in labour, “Anandhayi took a handful of ash from the box, plastered it on her forehead and muttered, *Sami. . .*’ *Let the slut come down and she will get it from me. She who has claimed up has to climb down.*(4).

What writer K.Panchangam says regarding male female discrimination is quoted by Vasuki in her book in Tamil *Dalitiya Chikkalkalum Theervukalum*. The male is active and has been dominating in every field namely political, cultural, trade etc. He also says that only man has the capacity to design the society and the world whereas the female on the other hand has always been depending on man and is subservient to him. She confines herself to her house because the male is dynamic and works towards progress and considered more sacred. This point of view is expressed by Sivakami also in *The Taming of Women* in the following lines spoken by Periyannan, “ ‘Do you know that no matter how

many wives I have I will forget them all for you? I cannot bear not seeing you even for a day. Wherever I am I have to come back to you for my peace' "(92). The woman has to suffer and cannot question her man for anything. "Anandhayi's heart felt heavy. Here she lay alone on her bed while her husband shared his with a lighter-skinned woman. Her faceless parents, who deserted her very young, disturbed her now and she burst into tears"(115).

Anandhayi could not question the wicked deeds of her husband; nor did she have her parents to comfort her. In spite of all her virtues and skills, she did not try to come out of all her troubles because of her children.

She felt as if her whole life was shattered and there was no silver lining visible. Not only her parents, today she felt abandoned by all her relatives. Not wanting to waste another moment she untied the broom and threw the rope on to the ceiling. Just as she was going to tighten the noose she glanced at Arul asleep on the floor and the milk dregs on the floor next to her.

Anandhayi changed her mind, released the noose and started to wail. (84)

In *The Grip of change* the Dalit woman Thangam was exploited both by the upper caste men as well as lower caste Dalit men. Sivakami brings out the fact that women are vulnerable to male exploitation and caste is a secondary category in the context of violation of woman's dignity. While Kathamuthu gained respectability for sporting two wives and exulted over keeping Nagamani who was born in a high caste, he reversed the equation and seriously reprimanded Thangam for having a liaison with an upper caste man. "Didn't you get a man from our caste that you succumbed to an Odaiyar?"(16). According to him a Dalit male, who was well-off, could bring in an Odaiyar woman, whereas an Odaiyar male

could not and would not marry or bring home a Dalit woman. She can only be his concubine but she could not enter his house. They could only meet at his fields. This is stated by Kathamuthu himself while taking pride in his claim that he has given Nagamani shelter and a protected life.

Though she hailed from an upper caste family, Nagamani became an easy catch for Kathamuthu despite the caste difference because she was a childless widow. He brought her home, without any legal or religious rites. Nagamani's widowhood rendered her vulnerable to sexual exploitation by different men who deserted her soon enough. She received no support from her family and hence her economic and social position was extremely insecure and pathetic. Kathamuthu is able to attract her precisely because of these reasons. Nagamani accepted Kathamuthu as her master, protector, and husband so as to escape the travails of a poor, miserable and abandoned woman, who is left to fend for herself. He masked his lust and casteist designs by claiming to be Nagamani's saviour and he became her shelter by giving her a new lease of life. Thus gender and class position play a significant part in fixing a woman's social identity while they aid a man in consolidating his social prestige. Both Kanagavalli and Nagamani in *The Grip of change* and Aanandayi and Lakshmi in *The Taming of Women*, are enmeshed in this exploitative, patriarchal arrangement. Both the legal wife and the concubine received a rough deal in their bargain for respectable domesticity. Nagamani and Lakshmi were driven by their poverty and sexual intimidation at the hands of men to give themselves up to one man who enjoyed a fixed income and social prestige. They offered their bodies to their master who inflicted enormous pain and demanded ceaseless service.

In all situations it is the woman who should take care of her family. In the patriarchal system, the husband lives only for himself and punishes his wife for every

single mistake of his own. He not only hid his mistakes, but also made his wife a prey for all the mistakes he made. In spite of his being a womanizer with all bad habits, Periyannan was accepted by the society because of its gender discrimination. He was very careful while pursuing his desires. “‘She’ll be here tonight. Make a nice mutton kolambu and bring it up quietly. Don’t let the demoness who’s just delivered know about it though’ ”(7).

Even when his son Balan died, Periyannan goes out of his house in search of his own pleasure even before the others left the house. When Anandhayi is angry with him, he shouted at her blaming her:

You did not stop the kid from chewing on raw rice throughout the day. Instead, you sat around complaining about me to your brood. He dies of a swollen stomach because of raw rice, and here she is cursing me as if she is a chaste woman. I work in the town. You have no field work to do. You sit at home, feeding yourself. Is it too much to care for the kids? One of yours waits for me to leave and at once begins to roam the streets on her cycle. Your elder son is paid to paint the town red in the name of education. There is enough rice to feed a man in a cowshed water tank. If I don’t work how do you and your brats expect to eat? You are no fancy rishi’s wife to throw curses at me. I don’t know who visits you in the night that I am not here! (97-98).

The above lines explain the culture and the tradition followed in the society. The concept of one for one is applicable only to women. Even now especially in the villages of India, people believe that patriarchal system only is prevalent and only men are entitled to get facilities like education, employment etc, whereas all women experience only problems

created by their husbands and the persons related to him. The women cannot get away from them. However, they try hard to forget their problems and carry on because of their children. Anandhayi wondered, “What did she feel for him now? Was it love, was she claiming her rights, or was she worried about her children’s safety? Had her parents been alive, she would have returned with her children long back. Why worry about things that cannot be? What if she were to leave him now? But then, who would feed her kids?”(122).

Protecting the child is considered to be the duty of women, and not as the responsibility of men. The society dumps all responsibilities on women right from bearing a child in her womb and feeding it with milk, and taking care of it. Even from childhood when boys are given freedom girls are confined to the four walls of their houses in the society. Thus the rules themselves sometimes become obstacles for their growth.

The woman who shares her husband with others undergoes pain and mental torture. When Anandhayi came to know about the relationship between Periyannan and Lakshmi, she felt very sad and she tries to attempt suicide. As her parents were dead, she was unable to move out of her house. So she continued to live with the womanizer and cruel minded Periyannan. She had the ability to work and earn more money than her husband but she could not do so because she had many children. So she tolerated everything and bore her sufferings patiently. She was so virtuous that she did not consider even Lakshmi as her rival. She tried to console her by talking about the way of the world when Lakshmi was not able to bear the tortures given by Periyannan any longer.

‘Okay, do not cry like a baby. I bore six children for him. If I step out, my children will lose their respect. I cannot count the number of blows I have received. But I am bearing all this pain only for my children. Otherwise, the

world will spit on me. Call me a bitch for saying I don't like my husband, when I already have children. I have little time left, may as well put up with it. Who knows how many more ugly matters I may have to face? (217).

Anandhayi comforted Lakshmi accepting her as her own family member. She tells Lakshmi that it was their fate that they both had to undergo the tortures given by Periyannan. Instead of opposing and raging in anger against Lakshmi, Anandhayi treated her as if she was her own sister. It is the patriarchal society that has created the proverb "Aane pillai aanalum jaane pillai" to prove this and it is very difficult to change the male domination in the society.

The kind of oppression that the Dalit women face is multilayered and complex. They have failed to get acceptable responsibility in the women's movement because it has remained only upper class. In this context mention must be made that in a country divided along caste, class and religion, feminism as a movement needs to be more complex, taking into consideration the multiple identities of women. Hence the Dalit women feel the need to have their own organization and different discourses to represent their experiences as Dalit women. Bama and Sivakami are within the community but also a little distant from it. They raise the important question in this respect which Radhakrishnan also brings up in his book *Between Identity and Location*. The question is 'ethnic theorist' (65), as he chooses to call the intellectual concerned as empowered enough to speak on behalf of the community. These Dalit writers have to be a little distant in order to be objective; there is always a danger of being in one's own community. This is perhaps what happened to Sivakami who happened to be more critical of her community than sympathetic and comprehending. Sivakami's fiction fuses Dalit discourse with feminist discourse. Her focus is as much upon the female body as a site of oppressed as upon a society that is fractured by caste. The

sexual exploitation of helpless Dalit women is juxtaposed to her politicization of sexual violence on Dalit women by uppercaste men and thereby scores a personal or mercenary gain.

Sivakami raises a clarion call for the upliftment of their Dalit counterparts. Dalit women also must strive for gender and caste equality by subverting from the dynamics of caste and transcend the interstices of identity. As Anthony J. Marshella observes in the book *Culture and Self: Asian Western Perspectives* that the growth of self depends on “physical and cultural environment”(23). The evolution of the self is seen tremendously in the Dalit women than the others, because of their life as the oppressed of the oppressed and the slave of the slave. The Dalit women are de-humanized not only by the oppression of the upper caste men but also by intra-racial oppression. Hence the dalit women suffer due to the race, gender and class. In society the Dalits are marginalized as untouchables, discriminated and denied their basic human rights. The condition of Dalit women is still miserable as they have to encounter inter-caste and intra-caste oppression and suppression. They have internal hierarchies as the Pallar, Parayar and Chakkiliyar and quarrel among themselves. Sivakami observes in *The Grip of Change*,

Even among the lower castes, hierarchies existed - Pallars were agricultural labourers, Parayars were drummers and menials, and the Chakkiliyars were cobblers. The first grade - the Pallars - were absent in Puliur. The Pallars considered themselves superior to the rest. The Parayars considered themselves higher than the Chakkiliyars, who in turn considered themselves superior to the Para-vannars, the washer community. The Para-vannars, men washed clothes for the lower caste and the women worked as midwives for them. Similar to almost all other human communities, the women were

considered to be lower than the men. Everyone established their worth by pointing to those beneath them.(63)

In this kind of society the Dalit woman has no security and whether a literate or ignorant she has to depend on her menfolk. All the same, their body (physique) is their first problem. For instance Thangam in *The Grip of Change* suffered physically because she was a young, helpless, poor childless widow with no means of her own. She got the sympathy of the readers when “the whole of her torso visible because she was not wearing a blouse, bore terrible bruises. Dried blood marked the flesh of her back . . . The skin of her thighs and knees was scored and shredded as though she had been dragged over a rough surface”(4-5). Thangam is an excellent representation of Dalit women who fall victim to gender and caste discrimination. Sivakami succeeds in extending the discussion on Dalit empowerment to feminist discussion by bringing in the issues of the sufferings of Dalit women. An equally pathetic parallel is found in *The Taming of Women* in Lakshmi, the helpless young lady Periyannan and his son Mani beat her like a dog after bringing her back. “You are soaking wet. Why the fucks do you cover your head? They dragged her in, ripped off her pallu and kept bashing her . . . (142). The bodies of Thangam and Lakshmi became the sad testimony to their plight as they are the sites of victimization. By focusing her attention on the characters of Thangam, and Anandhayi, Sivakami emphasizes the need for education and awareness for the Dalits. Gowri emerges as an individual and becomes the ship pioneering into new avenues. Sivakami depicts the liberated women through Anandhayi who fights for her individual rights. The sufferings and the bitter experiences these characters faced helped them to develop courage and patience. However, Gowri and Anandhayi are only exceptions.

Living in such a pitiable condition the Dalit woman has nothing to fall back upon, no love or sympathy, no shoulder to lean on, no authority to help; and out of this total vacuum she has to recreate herself and meet the challenges of life. Alice Walker in her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, succinctly point out, “And we cast out alone, to heal and Re-create ourselves”(213). They want to recreate their identity in the society; so does Sivakami’s character Gowri in *The Grip of Change* as she was distinctly different from the other Dalit women of her age. She wished to live like a safe harbour; she could have married and settled down like her mother Kanagavalli and the other Dalit women. But Gowri hated the mention of marriage itself. Her dislike of married life was owing to her father’s polygamy and gender injustice. Because after his marriage with Kanagavalli, he took in Nagamani, an upper class widow; he did not stop with her. Then he met Thangam, the poor Dalit helpless widow who approached him for help when she was physically assaulted by the Udaiyars. He solved her problem by twisting it into a caste issue and got for her the necessary compensation. But she had to give a heavy price for the help. He exploited her sexually and this kind of exploitation Gowri hated intensely in her father. But as her father Kathamuthu was a popular and respected leader of the people of Athur and the neighboring village, Thangam could not against him.

He had made it his career to help people in distress. He didn’t have much land, and its yield was average, but he could never pay enough attention to cultivating his own holding while he was busy sorting out village affairs. People depended on him because he never gave up. He was completely unafraid of anyone or anything. Humility and restraint were non-existent words in the vocabulary of this domineering man. He justified everything that he did with an inexhaustible source of stories from the

Mahabharata and Ramayana. His daughter Gowri was inclined to occasionally dip into the two epics because of this.(15)

Kathamuthu is a charismatic leader among the Parayar. Gowri avoided her father Kathamuthu because of his polygamy. Regarding Anandhayi she had lost her freedom even at the early age of her marriage because of the womanizer Periyannan. She was the primal mother, who controlled the affairs of the house. She sacrificed her life for the family and her children. The two main characters in both the novels of Sivakami, Anandhayi and Gowri lived under the domineering presence of Periyannan and Kathamuthu in their house. Gowri hated caste discrimination but as Kathamuthu told the Inspector, “ ‘but tell me a place where caste doesn’t exist. Just because you and I don’t talk about it, doesn’t mean it’s not there. It will persist till you and I die. In fact caste will be around for generations yet to come. We can’t ignore it ’ ”(22). However, hard people try to wipe out caste system, it is still prevalent. The same thing is expressed by the famous celebrated Dalit woman writer Bama also. She mentions in *Karukku* “whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find a way to study well and progress like everybody else. And this is why a wretched life style is all that is left to us”(23).

Sivakami’s novels highlight the domestic violence on Dalit women, the patriarchal silencing of wife and daughter, the sexual repression of Dalit women even while celebrating women bonding within and outside the family. Gowri, is an independent woman. When the wounded Thangam comes to her house, she glances at her and thinks, “ ‘I belong to the same caste as that woman. How can I be sure that I won’t be beaten up black and blue like her? I have seen things like this happening in the cinema. This is real, terror is sleeping on a mat in my house’ . Her thoughts chilled her even as the morning grew

hot”(14). This incident infuses in her the determination to study and change the grip. Though Gowri has many friends she could not bring them home because she is afraid of her father who would “fly a rage for no reason in front of her friends”(45). But in *The Taming of Women* the women characters Kala, Dhanam, and Arul are not independent in their childhood or in their womanhood. They are always controlled by men. The sufferings these women undergo under these domineering men make feel them miserable and question the existence of a benevolent God. Lakshmi asks “*Where is that God? He is someone who puts all women through a hundred trials. He is no God, Lakshmi thought to herself.*”(218).

Through these two novels Sivakami portrays the condition of the Dalit women in our society. But 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 possibility of modernity which nevertheless keeps place for age old injustices. However, people like Gowri and Anandhayi, have to go miles and miles to transcend the helplessness of the older generation.