

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature is one wing of Indian literature that has been born out of pain and poverty. Dalit literature or literature about the Dalits deals with the oppressed class of people under Indian caste system. Dalit literature shot into prominence after 1960 starting with the Marathi language followed by other languages like Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil through narratives like poems, short stories and autobiographies. Dalit literature and the autobiographies of the Dalits are based on the experiences the Dalits faced in their real life. Dalit literature denounced as petty and false the then prevailing rather bourgeois and romantic portrayal of life by the Sadashiv pethi literature which failed to deal with the issues of the Dalits like poverty and oppression by caste Hindus. It is compared with the African-American literature also especially in its depiction of racial discrimination and injustice, as seen in slave narratives.

Literature written by the members of the Dalit communities or the literature that is specifically written to represent the typical social, historical and cultural aspects of the Dalit communities is described as Dalit literature. Dalit is not a caste but a symbol of change and revolution. The main aim of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits. The struggle of the Dalits against the higher castes can be traced to the eleventh century. Madara Chennaiah, regarded by some scholars as the “Father of Vachana Poetry” was the first Dalit writer in the eleventh century; he was a cobbler saint, who lived in the light of western Chalukyas. In the twelfth century Kalavve challenged the caste system in the following words:

Those who eat goats, fowl and tiny fish:

Such, they call caste people.

Those who eat the Sacred Cow

That showers frothing milk for Shiva:

Such, they call outcaste. (qut.in Abedi 1)

Another poet is Dohara Kakkaiah, a Dalit by birth and six of his confessional poems survive. In the twentieth century the term ‘Dalit Literature’ came into use in 1958. Dalit, meaning oppressed, broken and downtrodden –came into use officially in the first conference on Dalit literature in Mumbai. In Marathi, Baburao Bagul (1930-2008) was the pioneer of Dalit writings. His first collection of stories, *Jevha Mi Jat Chorali* published in 1963 created a stir in Marathi. Gradually with other writers like Namdeo Dhasal these Dalit writings paved the way for strengthening Dalit politics.

The term Harijian meaning ‘God’s people’, used for the so-called ‘low’ caste was popularized by Gandhi. Ambedkar thought that Gandhi was not prepared to go far enough in the direction of the emancipation of the Dalits. In *What Gandhi and Congress Have Done to the Untouchables*, Ambedkar claimed that Gandhi never wanted to ‘hurt’ the interests of the upper caste Hindus. He argued in his book

In Gandhism, the common man has no hope. It treats man as an animal and no more. It is true that man shares the constitution and functions of animals, nutritive, reproductive, etc. But these are not distinctively human functions. The distinctively human function is reason, the purpose of which is to enable man to observe, meditate, cogitate, study and discover

the beauties of the universe and enrich his life and control the animal elements in his life. (11)

Man thus occupies the highest place in the scheme animate Dr.Ambedkar, the father of Dalit Movement said about the condition of the Dalits is quoted by Jaydeep Sarangi and Binod Mishra in the book *Exploration in Australian Literature*. “Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes Brahmanical ideology.”(31) In Tamil Nadu, Ka. Ayothidass Pandithar is the pioneer of the Dalit writers and philosophers. Rettamalai Srinivasan (Editor, Parayan), Rev.John Ratnam (Editor, Dravida Pandian), K.Appadurai (Editor Tamilan), Periasamy Pulavar (poet) and many other writers contributed to dalit literature. Yakkan, Stalin Rajangam, Kudiarasan, Ravikumar, Aranga Mallika, M.P.Ezhilarasu, Vadivel Ramanan, Raj Gowthaman, Gowthama Sannah, Punitha Pandian, Meena Mayil are all major writers who contributed to the Non fictional Dalit Literature and the first few are ideologues of Dalit political ideologies in contemporary Tamil Dalit politics.

P.Sivakami and Bama who wrote the first modern Dalit fiction, Ambimani, Poomani, Chanakya, Vizhi.Pa.Idhaya Vendhan, Artist Chandru, poet Sukirtharani, poet Pratibha Jayachandran, Yazhan Adhi, and some others worked on Dalit modern fiction and poetry. V.Geetha, M.S.S.Pandian, Senchattai Panjacharam, A.Marx, S.V.Rajadurai are Non-Dalit writers of Dalit ideology and Dalit literature. Sakya Mohan who edited “Dhamma” in English and Tamil authored the first book on Dalit History of Tamil Nadu titled *History of Dalit Struggle for Freedom* (2001). Sakya Mohan has introduced “Kala Parayar Empire” (Buddhist Era) in the history of Tamil Nadu supported by a lot of

primary sources negating the historical view that Kala Parayar period was “the dark age” in Tamil Nadu.

The first Dalit autobiography in Tamil *Karukku* (1992), written by the Dalit writer Bama, was published and was warmly received by readers and critics. It discusses the oppression borne by Dalits. She highlights how Dalit women are oppressed further by Dalit men at home. The collusion of patriarchy with caste hegemony is a harsher and more unjust suppression of Dalit women as shown in Bama’s *Sangati* (1994). Dalit women’s dual oppression on account of gender and caste is depicted in great detail. *Sangati* is a feminist narrative where in Bama endeavors to expand her feminist agenda to enlist caste oppression as a subject of concern. Bama’s third novel, *Vanmam* (2002) argues for forging a better unity among Dalit groups and for avoiding intra-Dalit strife. Bama’s ‘novel’ is an activist intervention in the literary domain and renders Dalit writing as essentially an act of political exercise.

Meena Kandasamy the ‘first Indian woman writer, writing Dalit poetry in English’, belongs to a long tradition of militant Dalit literature that not only focuses on the multifaceted atrocities faced by Dalits. In the poem “One-eyed” poems in the collection of Ms. Militancy,

the pot sees just another noisy child

the glass sees an eager and clumsy hand

the water sees a parched throat slaking thirst

but the teacher sees a girl breaking the rule

the doctor sees a medical emergency

the school sees a potential embarrassment

the press sees a headline and a photo feature

dhanam sees a world torn in half.

her left eye, lid open but light slapped away

the price for a taste of that touchable water.

She is an Indian poet, fiction writer, activist and translator and the aim of her poetry is to send a social message. Many of her works focus centered on feminism and the anti-caste. In her poetry, *Touch* (2006), and in the aptly titled *Ms. Militancy* (2010) the re-evaluation of our supposed ‘national culture’ and the icons of our supposed ‘national history’ are dealt with. Her two poetry collections are *Touch* and *Ms. Militancy* dealing with the complex matrix of subjugation which punctuates Dalit existence in India, her works are based on her own analogy and as a guerrilla without guns, her poetry not only offers a stringent critique of caste ideologies but also excavates those abysmal crevices of our ‘imagined community’ whose depths are inhabited by countless subalternized communities.

Sukirtharani is a prominent Dalit poet, writing in Tamil. She is working on a novel which she describes as Dalit-feminist. In 2009, she organized a poets’ protest against the violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka, in which a large number of poets read. She has published four collections of poetry: *Kaippatri Yen Kanavu Kel*, *Iravu Mirugam*, *Avalai Mozhi Peyarthal*, and *Theendappataatha Muththam*. Recently, she was given the Sundhara Ramasamy Viruthu Award by Neithal Ilakkiya Amaippu, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu.

The interrogative and self-reflexive nature of Tamil Dalit discourse renders a significant pointer to contemporary social or political reality. Collections of short stories have been published throughout the nineties and thereafter. Apart from Sivakami's and Iyamam's, there have been many more writers who have brought out collections of short stories and continue to publish in journals and little magazines. Some of the short-story writers have written novels, poetry and plays as well.

Abimani's short stories deal with the gender pressures on Dalit women and caste hegemony over women at large. He has brought out three collections: *Nokkadu* (1993), *Tettam* (2001) and *Oorchoru* (2003). In one of the stories, Abimani depicts a Dalit male's appropriation of an upper caste woman's body on the strength of his gender although he is restrained by his lower caste status in all the other matters. Abimani's stories point out that like the Dalit women who are oppressed by caste hegemony and Dalit patriarchy the upper caste women are also oppressed in a patriarchal society.

Edayavendan has three collections to his credit: *Nandanar Teru* (1991), *Vadai Paudum Vazhvy* (1994) and *Tai Mann* (1996). A playwright like Inquilab presents a Dalit woman character as a Sutradar in one of his plays *Meetchi* (2003). Gunasekaran's play takes up the question of interlocking of gender and caste concerns most forcefully in his play *Bali Aadugal* (1999).

Anbadavan's poems discuss issues like reservation benefits to Dalits and animosity of the upper castes towards Dalits on account of the policy of reservation, Dalit women's gender oppression and the need for Dalits to organize themselves as a group so as to empower themselves politically as well as avail their constitutional

rights. He envisions the day when Dalits would affirm their rights and take their turn at the seat of power to challenge the acts of violence by upper castes on Dalits.

Almost all Dalit writers, in whichever genre they write, depict a similar graph of a Dalit woman's life and career. Sexual assaults at home and rape at workplace or custodial rape are the most frequently encountered experiences of Dalit women. Dalit writers foreground such a sexually repressive and oppressive social structure that invades the domestic and the social space. Their writings bring forth caste hegemony and patriarchal structure which seek to control a Dalit woman's sexual life and conduct. Dalit's are oppressed at all levels-caste and class, and the theoretical variety of revolutionaries cannot imagine the predicament in which these wretched people live in.

Their painful experience is not just the suffering of the individual and there is nothing romantic about it. They do not seek poetic beauty, similes, metaphors and symbols are not important. The reality of their life is too hideously shocking, beyond the capacity of fantasy or imagination. Arjun Dangle in his book, *Past, Present and Future of Dalit Literature Quoted in Poisoned Bread* voices out "The creation of Dalit literature is inevitable until the structure of society changes and as long as exploitation exists"(7). Dalit literature deserves to be known to the entire world - the children, the elders and the next generation of this country. The misery of the Dalit is brought through the words of Om Prakash Valmiki in his poem, "My Ancestor." He presents the condition of the Dalits:

The body Unclothed

The stomach unfed

Hurt, and yet

They smiled

For they saw you smiled.

They did not know

How to loot

The weak and the innocent!

Did not know

That murder

Is the badge of courage

That robbery is not a crime

It is but culture.

How innocent they were

My ancestors

Humane

Yet untouchable. (30)

Dalits have broken the silence and have made their voices heard through literature. The writers try to portray the fact that materially Dalits may be very poor but inwardly they are wealthier. The revolutionary ideas of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, as argued by Arjun Dangle, a Marathi Dalit writer and leader of the Dalit Panther Movement paved the way for Dalit literature. Ambedkar's ideologies reach out to the masses through Dalit literature. Sharma says in the book *Indian Society Institution and Change* "those

disabilities which were imposed upon the scheduled caste by the superior castes”(77). The Dalits were forced to form a group for themselves. For example, “Cheris” in South India and “Basti” in the North. These writers have created the literature of the oppressed with the vision of removing untouchability and establishing equality.

Dalit poetry combines the spirit of rebellion against social injustice with dreams of a life of dignity for the oppressed. Namdeo Dhasal, wrote the poetry closer to the modernist sensibility but with an unmistakable stamp of the anger of a rebel. In his celebrated collection *Golpitha*, he wrote,

I curse you, curse your book
 Curse your culture, your hypocrisy_
 I wasn't going to say this
 but now my hands have woken up.(25)

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

. . . Dalit feminists, who speak for their women and spearhead causes like inter-caste marriages, are often branded separatists. They may be on the periphery — but they ironically form the core issues because they speak for large numbers who have been affected by discrimination. The Dalit feminists need more encouragement from the country to emerge from their shells.

Man is a bundle of contradictions. While he speaks for the abolition of slavery, untouchability, racial discrimination and other such social evils on the one hand, he tries

to maintain such inequalities on the other. Sivakami, the iron lady of South India stated “I want to be an instrument of change” her fame mainly rests on her writing based on the lives and issues of the Dalit community. She echoes the idea of Robert Kegan who said:

Change does not fail to occur because of insincerity. The heart patient is not insincere about his wish to keep living, even as he reaches for another cigarette. Change fails to occur because we mean both things. It fails to occur because we are a living contradiction. (n.p)

Sivakami who had been one of the senior most Administrative Officers in the state of Tamil Nadu, was born in the year 1957 and grew up in Perambalur. A Dalit woman IAS officer, Sivakami started her journey from Tamil Nadu to Tokyo to serve as Regional Director of the Indian Tourist office. Sivakami travelled to foreign countries on government mission and brought back varied experiences. The position she held, gave her opportunities to meet Dalit men and women and these meetings helped her to know the stark reality and hence these social issues become Sivakami’s primary concern and avocation. Since she believes that education can do much to eliminate discrimination, she motivates the parents living in small villages to provide education to their children.

Even when she was at school Sivakami started writing and she willingly joined the essay competitions and the teachers encouraged her to write for the Christian magazine, which had a very local circulation. When she joined college, she started getting exposed to foreign writers. She usually read Russian books because they used to be sold for one or two rupees. That’s how she acquired a liking for fiction.

Sivakami participated in an intercollegiate short story writing competition and won a prize at the state level. The story was published in a magazine called Dinamani Kadir, and she received many letters of appreciation. As the story was about a shepherd

boy and his daily timetable, they started asking her, are you a shepherd yourself? What is your solution to his problems? This triggered a lot of questions about what literature is, what she was writing about and so on. That made her think a lot and that alliterated her spontaneous writing.

Although Sivakami continued to write, she did not publish her works. However, she concentrated on academics and she got a gold medal in her MA History. Then she got through her IAS exams. However, she felt that was not her goal. She said in an interview “I thought it is socially well-laced, and paying well, so why not? I got through. Only after that I started wondering, have I had truly become what I want to become? All the while, I had been thinking of myself as a writer. Reading and writing gives me a lot of pleasure. So then I started writing again, short stories.”

When Sivakami could not find a publisher, her friend came forward to publish her first work and she gave him some money, but he never returned it. The book was lying in the press and all that she got were only a few copies. The book never reached the public. She wrote the first book under a pseudonym because she didn't want to reveal who she was?. She wrote the second book in her own name but she did not want to use her power as an IAS officer to sell it. So she gave it to one of her friends and asked him to sell it if he could, without revealing her identity. The first publisher refused to publish her work saying that language of her book was very colloquial and, not up to literary standards and then after two years, when it was finally published, it hit the roof. The left movement took the book to villages and organized meetings to discuss it. The book centered around a Dalit village leader called Muthu, and his daughter Gowri, a college girl who was against the caste structure in the villages of Tamil Nadu, driving home the message that the backward classes and Dalits should come together and fight the system, as well as the

exploitation by power brokers within the community, Dalit patriarchy and so on. Since then, she had no trouble in publishing her books.

Today, there are at least a hundred prominent writers from different Dalit communities and three journals for Dalit writing namely Dalit Murasu, Bodhi Dalit and Adi Tamil Sivakami herself edited one magazine for 15 years. It's called Puthiya Kodangi: Puthiya means 'new' and Kodangi is an instrument that is used to drive away the evil spirit; caste is symbolically the evil spirit she is trying to drive out. The main preoccupation of these magazines which have limited circulation is to deconstruct existing institutions, including literature. Though it is primarily a literary magazine, she decided to include discussion on political and social issues because Dalit literature is not only for aesthetics but also for celebration of identity.

With her novels, shorts stories and essays Sivakami has made a significant contribution to world literature. She is a prominent Tamil writer with more than fifty short stories and many novels to her credit. *Kathaigal*, is a collection of short stories (2003), set in Japan, Chennai, Kodaikanal or a landscape away from the ordinary, a magical world of dreams. *Kadasi Manthar*(1997),is another collection of short stories all dealing with social issues from women's characters and perspective, often capturing mindscapes and dreams. Her writings in the Journal *Pudiya Kodangi* are much different from her novels. Her works deal with politics, culture, feminist theory, Dalit identity, gender-class-caste intersections that are the results of her experiences at workshops, trainings organized for Dalits, tribals and other marginalized communities.

Sivakami quit the administrative service after 29 years in 2008 and joined politics a year later contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Kanyakumari representing the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). After that she founded her own political party Samuga Samathuva

Padai in 2009 which according to her is, “Based on the principles of Dalit educationist and political leader Dr. Bhima Rao Ambedkar; it is a forum for social equality”. She explained about her stand:

If I mention that I quit because of the caste discrimination at the higher level, people would argue that not everyone facing discrimination quit the IAS. Hence, I would say that I quit of my own sweet will that was thrust upon me! Additionally, I had prepared myself for this exit at least for a decade. Other factors apart, I was guided by a strong desire to work for the poor and the disadvantaged.

Sivakami writes from the experiences she had with the society she portrays, a life that at once feels familiar and alien to urban middle class readers. She deals with the lower socio-economic class with its trials and tribulations in the struggle for power across genders and class and at times even among the peers. In spite of the efforts taken by social reformers and the Government policies the discrimination is not completely abolished. A reflection of this idea could be found in the poem of the Gujarati poet Parveen Ganghiv. He says:

I can be a Hindu,
 A Budhist,
 A Muslim,
 But this shadow
 Shall never be severed from me,
 The kuldi is gone,

The broom is gone,

But the shadow

Still stalks me.

I can change my name,

My job,

My village,

My caste,

But the shadow

Will never leave me alone.(43)

Caste is an appendage that will follow one like the shadow wherever he goes.

Sivakami has published five novels and four short story collections and is a regular contributor to the literary Magazine *Puthiya Kodangi*. One of the pioneers of Dalit writing in Tamil, Sivakami has written the first Dalit Tamil novel *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum* in 1989, which has been translated as *The Grip of Change* (2006). A literary and commercial success, the novel created a stir by taking on the patriarchy in the Dalit movement. The Tamil version of *The Grip of Change* has been written, when the novelist was twenty-six years old. *The Grip of Change* is a process of understanding the dynamics of caste and the 'Woman' who is inextricably involved in the process. The novel has been translated into English by the author herself. Thus through the English rendering Sivakami manages to re-read her novel once more as translation invariably brings in an objectivity towards the source-text. The translation reflects Sivakami's easy command

over English, avoiding uneasy jerks or ornate vocabulary. It is an almost flawless translation, impressive in its disciplined erasure of authorial subjectivity that often surreptitiously invades author translated works.

Sivakami made a short film *Oodaha* (through) based on a story written by one of her friends. Set in 1995, it was selected by the National Panorama and won the President Award the same year. In the literary circle, Sivakami is considered a strong Dalit writer with a feminist penchant. The novel *The Grip of Change* has two books: Book one is entitled Kathamuthu: *The Grip of Change* and book two is entitled Gowri: Author's Notes. Sivakami did not choose to put her first novel behind. There are two readings contributed by Meena Kandasamy and C.S.Lakshmi.

The second novel *Anandhayi* (1992) is about the lives of Dalit women and also about the violent treatment of women at the hands of men. The novel has been translated as *The Taming of Women* by Pritham K. Chakravarthy, a translator and editor of *The Blaft Anthology of Tamil Pulp Fiction*. The Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore has translated her novel *Kurukku Vettu* into five languages. Another novel she wrote in Tamil is *Unmaikku Munnum Pinnam* (2012).

Sivakami's first novel *The Grip of Change* tells the story of a Dalit family drawn into the struggle for justice when a woman of their caste is beaten up by the relatives of her upper-caste employer and lover. The woman, Thangam, is at the absolute bottom of the inherited social order. A childless Dalit widow, her meagre inheritance has been usurped by her husband's family. Seeking refuge she comes to the home of Kathamuthu, a Parayar who has learned to work in the legal and administrative system of post-Independent India. In addition he knows how to mobilize the rhetoric of caste to jolt the local administration into taking cognizance of caste brutality. Thangam finds justice in his

care. However, Kathamuthu is also a patriarch who has complete control over the three women in his life, his two wives, Kanagavalli and Nagamani, and his almost grown up daughter Gowri. Thangam who comes to him for help and refuge, becomes the fourth woman in the household as the money she gains as compensation from her upper caste oppressors as well as her inheritance retrieved from her relatives faste her with Kathamuthu. The three women, having worked through the shakeout of competitive posturing, finally find a common cause in a patriarchal set-up they have made peace with, even as they learn to fight caste-based inequality. Gowri, however, remains a silent observer, never able to stop herself from flinching at Kathamuthu's authoritarianism or his disregard of the consequences of his vulgarity.

Kathamuthu must own the status of his caste and he must articulate it, in order to fight its oppression. Gowri in watching quietly but never silencing her judgments must own her inequality along two axes: caste and gender. The first is public and never far from being political. The second is private. It operates within the family. And for all his muscle-flexing to maintain control, Kathamuthu knows that on gender – just as in caste – empowerment is inevitable, no matter how slow or sporadic it may be. It is not just Gowri who will transcend the helplessness of her parent's generation. When she appears for the last time she is 31 years old, with a doctorate degree and a good teaching job. With the benefit of education and the consciousness generated among the Dalits, Gowri, was able to create her own identity.

Writer Sivakami considers herself a Dalit writer and activist. This belief is constantly reflected in her recent short-stories and reviews. Her novel *The Grip of Change* puts an end to Kathamuthu's old era and brings in a new beginning with Gowri's present condition and future prospects. One cannot say that those miraculous dreams and voice of

trust have been completely revealed. What actually has been revealed is the understanding of Indian caste system, the revelation of things that can be done and symptoms of change. Here it is important that the ultimate joy of the achieved dream is not shown either by Gowri or in Sivakami's writings. However, these kinds of writings and reviews are appreciated and considered as the best and forward thinking writings.

Periyannan, of the novel *The Taming of Women* is also a representative of a dominant class like Kathamuthu of *The Grip of Change*. Kathamuthu and Periyannan are depicted and acknowledged as people with the ability to earn money. These two persons are also the ones who are subjected to criticism for male domination in both the novels. Like Kathamuthu who gives trouble to his wives, Periyannan also makes his wife Anandhayi and his concubine Lakshmi suffer under the cover of family. The idea emphasized by Sivakami through these novels is that the pleasure derived from a man's body by a woman is only the beginning of a prolonged pain.

Cross Section is another famous fictional work of Sivakami. This novel has the subtext running at the bottom of each page throughout the novel, creating a critical space in which the author examines the problems of female sensitivity, female desire, ideological control of the narrator - in short, a self-reflexive exercise articulating the theoretical issues in narration and reorientation of feminist or female experience in the post-feminist era. The novel may read like a popular representation of women's common dilemmas but at the core of the novel is, however, a search for a space for the expression of woman's free spirit.

The story is about a middle-class working woman Saro who finds herself drawn to a man Kumar, something which puts her on the horns of a dilemma between her loyalty to her husband and children and her feeling of deep love for a man outside the

fold of marriage. The singular feature of this fictional work is the familiar love-triangle and its trauma.

Sexual pleasure is only for the man who is involved in that act and not to the woman who is united within especially a woman of the lower caste because this act is the beginning of a sequence of painful experiences like conception, abortion, pregnancy, delivery and nursing of children and all other works related to motherhood and family. How can a woman be happy under such circumstances? Sivakami makes the readers analyze all these through her novels.

Sivakami's novels do not subscribe to any social movement that operates in isolation. She does not endorse a one-dimensional Dalit movement. She constantly strives to point out the inter-penetrative, multilayered dimension of exploitation of Dalits. Their marginalization takes place at multiple levels. A single dominant force may not be the sole cause of their suffering in society. In the same way multipronged attack is suggested in her writing whereby the Dalits can find deliverance from discrimination. Gowri is not for the institution of marriage because it is a patriarchal institution that legitimizes gender oppression. Even at 32, she prefers to affirm her single, unmarried status. She is angry with Kathamuthu when he suggests marriage to her. She asks,

‘The sufferings that my mother underwent in her marriage! I don't want to be tortured like her by some man.’ She also added, ‘Moreover, I need a father who can respect his son-in-law.’ This, from the Gowri who used to be scared to stand in front of him! She would fill her plait with flowers, hide from her father and run to school like a hunted creature. She was earning her living now. Her self-confidence had grown in proportion to her independence. (124-125)

Gowri stands for working towards an anti-capitalist, anti-caste and anti-patriarchal structure or framework in which Dalits can lead a life of dignity and equality.

Sivakami foregrounds such a denial of affection and comfort of the hearth as oppressive to women. Striking at the root of female bonding, at the bond between mother and daughter, validating physical violence and emotional abuse upon daughters, sisters and wives, denying sexual freedom or inheritance rights and restricting their right to education, family, as an institution operates as an oppressive power structure against women of all age groups.

The two Dalit writers Sivakami and Iyamam in their works originally written in Tamil. Through these novels they emphasize their use of oral traditions. Their merely offering 'authentic' pictures of Dalit oppression or culture is to negate the significance of their choice of form, a political choice. The novels of Sivakami and Om Prakash Valmiki can be analyzed on a similar note. Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's life* and *The Grip of Change* respectively are significant for their depiction of ill treatment of the Dalit by their high caste counterparts in free India. Sharma's observation regarding the children and their education is quoted by Domnic Savio in his article "Amplified-Dalit Voices in *Joothan* and *The Grip of Change*: A Comparative study in the Atlantic Literary Review "The Harijan children did not have the right to enter the schools because if they sat down to study along with other children, it would have defiled the latter" (92). Such treatment meted out to the children of the lower caste would hurt them. Bama says in her novel *Karukku*. Who are Dalits? All those are oppressed: all hill peoples, neo Buddhists, labourers, destitute farmer women and all those who have been exploited politically, economically, or in the name of religion are Dalits (28).

Dalits are always discriminated by the society; wherever they move, their name does not change. In a literary world that was used to comfort and pleasure, Sivakami's novels slap the reverie out of reading and force the readers to face what was also real about the India which is not free from caste and gender discrimination. Sivakami's deftness at characterization and her amazing word-building ability shines through her works. In her interview given to the Gulf news, Sivakami says about the sufferings and treatment meted out to the Dalit women:

Dalit women are confronted with discrimination, exclusion and violence to a larger extent than men. Land and property issues in particular, tend to cause or be at the root of conflicts over which Dalit women have faced eviction, harassment, physical abuse and assault. Dalit women are often denied access to or are evicted from their land by dominant castes, especially if it borders land belonging to such castes. They are thus forced to live in the outskirts of village, often on barren land. Reportedly, on many occasions, cases of violence against dalit women are not registered and adequate procedures are not taken by the police.

Indian society has a very rigid social system which is caste-based. Since every Indian is identified by his caste in the society, one enjoys or regrets the caste in which he is born. The so called dominant or upper class of people consider themselves superior to the subordinate class of people in social, economic and political terms. The attainment of freedom or equality of women has not yet received their state of development as is seen in certain aspects like the freedom of expression, liberty and decision making capacity. Active participation of people irrespective of their religion or caste is very important for a democratic and developing country like India. It is very important to see whether the

community of women is able to express freely and demand respect and dignity in the society. Dalit Women are portrayed as lively, courageous and hard working individuals with tremendous inner strength to face any kind of crisis. However, the prevalent current situation is very different. Hence, the discrimination shown between the upper caste and the lower caste women becomes the subject of the writer. Amar Nath Prasad and M.B.Gaijan in the book *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, point out what Bernadine Evariso, a black British writer aptly says in this regard “we have to write about ourselves. Otherwise we won’t exist in literature or history”(179). Dalit writers have moved from the margin to the centre, from invisibility to visibility, from speechlessness to speech. Women writers gaining equality, justice, opportunity and dignity at home and at society have become the vision and mission of Dalit literature. Dalit literature portrays fragments of truth aspiring to effect change in the society.

At least one crime is committed against a Dalit every day. The state and condition of the Dalit are becoming worse day by day. It is worthwhile to make a note of the poem” If I was a tree”by Mudnakudu Chinnaswamy here in this context:

If I was a tree

I wouldn’t ask the bird

before it built its nest

what caste it is.

When sunlight embraced me

my shadow wouldn’t feel defiled.

My friendship with the cool breeze and the leaves

would be sweet.

Rain drops wouldn't turn back

taking me for a dog-eater

When I branch out further from my roots

Mother Earth wouldn't flee shouting for a bath.

The sacred cow would scrape her body on my bark. . .(52)

Unless all human beings are treated equally and with dignity without any discrimination of caste, class or gender, man cannot call himself the crown of beings. Women are denied inner or material happiness within the home. Within the domestic space that has been traditionally designated as women's domain, women - wives, daughters, mothers, beloveds- receive unchecked violence and discrimination. Hence, they seek deliverance outside traditional roles. Education, work, ideological consciousness, collective participation organized and socially committed movements - these are some of the positive alternative strategies that Sivakami opens up for women which could help them to come out of patriarchal control as well as caste oppression. In Sivakami's novels gender oppression overrides caste exploitation of Dalit communities. She presents patriarchy as an over-riding, pervasive, oppressive structure that binds women and perhaps men as well to a hierarchical, violent and restrictive social identity. Hence, she advocates simultaneous, relentless, social confrontation of both caste and gender injustice.

Imayam, said "*Do you remember the kutthuvilakku – the lamp that looks it's laughing? . . . Even if you are put out for some reason or other, you mustn't turn into the*

ash used to clean vessels, like me. Shine on forever.” He was born in the year 1964 with the pen name of V. Annamalai, he is a prominent Indian novelist in Tamil. A Dalit school teacher in Virdhachalam, he lets ideology emerge from life. He studied in Tamil- medium until he joined Periyar EVR College in Trichy for his BSc. All classes there were in English. ‘ I could understand neither the physics nor the English ‘. Imayam’s first work was written for a competition in St. Joseph’s College, Trichy around 1984-85. He attended a thirty-day writers workshop organized by the All Indian Catholic Universities Federation (AICUF). He read all writings of Jayakanthan and Poomani and the pamphlets and discussions on the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka were a major influence. He completed his first draft for the novel *Koveru Kazhudaigal* and showed it to his professor Albert from the English department. Instead of offering his comments his profession told him to rewrite it. This happened seven times.

Imayam introduced the dramatic monologue into Tamil writing. He had consciously worked on the form portraying real-life situations. He complains that Dalit writers are not addressing the greatness in Dalit life, a life where language is alive, where there is no widowhood, and where there is also happiness. He points out that different kind of readers – feminists and communists enjoyed his novels. Then he said ‘When I wrote the book in 1984, we did not know the word ‘Dalit’. Around 1989, Nirapirikai introduced us to feminism, but it was only in the 1990 that the term Dalit emerged.’ His writings generally depict the real life observations with a modern narration.

Long before the interface between Dalit identity and politics had been clearly established, Dalit writers in Tamil Nadu made their impact felt on the literary scene.

Writers such as Imayam, Sivakami, Ravikumar, Poomani and Bama testify to the trend. But when it comes to the link between identity and literature, some of them have reservations about using the term ‘Dalit literature.’

The writing of a Brahmin from Thanjavur or some other region is just identified as literature. The works of Ki. Rajanarayanan are described as *karisal kattu* (dryland) literature, Nanjil Nadan's work as *Nanjil Naattu* literature and Perumal Murugan's work as *Kongu* literature. No one is referring to the writer's caste identity. I am also a writer and am against any branding. . . (n.p)

Imayam's first novel *Koveru Kazhudaigal* (1994) translated as *Beasts of Burden* by Lakshmi Holmston into English plays a major role in Dalit fiction. He wrote *Koveru Kazhudaigal* more or less in a single sitting one night after hearing a vannaatti, a washerwoman, cry about her life. In *Beasts of Burden* also, we see Arokkyam and her family, especially Mary, suffering a lot at the hands of the rich. The tragedy occurs not because they belong to a low caste washerman family, but mostly because they belong to the poor class. Mary was seduced by Chadayan who also belongs to the low caste. They were not able to do anything about that because Chadayan, though low by birth, belongs to the rich class. So, what makes Mary's life questionable and miserable is not the caste system but the class division.

In his novel *Beasts of Burden* Imayam deals with the problem of Puthirai Vannaars, dhobis working for the Dalits. Writer Sundara Ramasamy wrote “There is no novel that equals this one in the last 100 years of Tamil writing.” his writings based on the Dalit intellectuals like Raj Gauthaman have criticized the novel for focusing only on

the shortcomings of Dalits and being the kind of novel that ‘upper’ castes praised. This is the story of a Dalit Christian couple Savuri and Arokkyam. The story moves along with Arokkyam. She is the one who guards and guide the family and its tradition. A very strong-willed woman, the gradual decline in their income due to various external factors drastically affects them. The author has brought the decline clearly: Sasi in the review of *Beasts of Burden*

I have seen some of them. They not only collect clothes and do washing but also involve in all other events from birth to death without expecting and asking much. The couple used to these kind of daily things (i think i can call it slavery) but their children started asking questions and not accepting that life anymore. The conversation between Arokkyam and Joseph about the habit of collecting food at night is something very sentimental and we need to answer him. Arokkyam’s life goes awkwardly downwards with changing lifestyle of the people as she moves on with her memories of good time and hope for the future.(n.p)

In the second novel *Arumugam* the main story centres around the boy Arumugam who runs away from home when he see his widowed mother Dhanabhagyam sleeping with a white man Jerry Albert, the varied experiences he undergoes and how he finally comes to terms with the reality of life. Thrown from a secure and fabric loving home into the cruel world of the Chekkumedu prostitutes, Arumugam learns that his perceptions of life are not real and that the only truth is the voice of a loving heart.

The second novel *Arumugam* (1999) is about the relationship between a mother and son, the difficult emotions that weave their stories into a single fabric of love. In *Arumugam*, after the death of her husband Raman, Dhanabhagyam has to make both ends meet. She is given a job at Auroville Farm where the supervisor Jerry Albert was always leering at her. Dhanabhagyam, due to her poverty, could do nothing else, but to yield to him. Further, she has to take care of her son's education for which she requires money. Hence she is forced by her circumstances to take up 'Mrs. Warren's profession'. It is to be noted that it is this way of her life that leads to the death of her father and the disappearance of her son Arumugam.

The manager of Auroville farm seduces Vasantha but the wrong-doer goes unpunished as it is the way of the world. But the helpless poor worker is forced to flee the place. Iyamam also observes how a poor woman like Chinnaponnu has to yield to prostitution for her livelihood. After getting his lustful urge gratified one moneyed rogue goes to the extent of killing Chinnaponnu and her murder goes untried simply because she belongs to a poor family. All that the poor people could do is to bemoan their way of life, for them there is no way out. The helplessness of the poor is very tellingly punctuated by incidents of this kind.

After Arumugam's running away from his mother, both he and Dhanabhagyam lead a very miserable and pitiable life. Arumugam is forced to live in the midst of prostitutes, pulling rickshaws and doing odd errands for his livelihood. His mother, tormented by her own immoral act starts roaming from place to place in search of Arumugam. She finds her son but her conscience does not allow her to be united to Arumugam and she hangs herself. All these people Dhanabhagyam, Arumugam, Vasantha and Bhagyam – thus, suffer on account of the exploitation by the rich.

Imayam's novel *Sedal* (2006) written in Tamil, deals with Dalit community whose women are designated as oracles. These women appointed during droughts fix the date for village festivals, perform koothu, participate in death rituals and are not allowed a marital relationship. The novel is based on the real life experiences of a real character Sedal given over to the temple during the 1945-46 droughts in Tamil Nadu, whose family leaves her behind and migrates to Sri Lanka. It explores among other things issues related to her maturation and sexuality.

Imayam's *Sedal* deals mainly with the misfortune caused to the heroine due to one of the religious customs that exist in many parts of India. The story is based on a ritual called pottukattu. The main character Sedal was forced into the practice even when she was very young, in order to appease Goddess Selliamman for getting rains. Since they belong to a lower caste, her parents are not able to do anything about that. She is separated from her family and forced to live in a hut with a harassing old woman. Even this does not last long because the old woman dies and Sedal is left alone.

What is more shocking to Sedal is that she is not permitted to enter into any village elder's house when she attains puberty. This forces her to think of putting an end to her wretched life. However, fortunately for her, a distant relative Ponnann takes her to his house. She plays an active part in Ponnann's troupe of dancers and starts performing in village temples.

The next novel written by Imayam *En Kadhai* (2015) is about the painful experience and emotion of love failure. It's a beautiful portrayal of love life between Vinayakam and Kamala. Kamala is left a widow, when her husband died in an accident. She gets the job of her husband on compassionate grounds. In her office she meets Vinayakam who is

from a small village. Vinayakam is doubtful about her love for him. But Kamala wanted Vinayakam only for his riches and sexual relationship. He decided to kill her one day, but he was unable to kill her because of his love for her. In this novel, writer Iyayam explains the value of love and the two character condition based on our tamil society. The writer has no end to the story, the writer leaves the end of the story to the readers.

Iyayam's other works including the collection of short stories in Tamil *Manbaram* (2002), *Vedio Mariyappan* (2008), *Savu Soru* (2014) and *Kolai Cheval* (2013). His work *Pethavan*, a novella is based on the real life tragic love story of Divya and Ilavarasan of Dharmapuri.

Iyayam has received several awards for his writings, including the Agni Akshara (1994), The Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers' Award (1994), Amutham Adigal Ilakkiya Award (1998), and the Sahitya Ackademi Award in Tamil. Iyayam's novel is considered as one of the classic of modern Tamil literature specially in Dalit writing. All the works have one common feature – sexual harassment of women by the upper caste or by the dominant male community.

Iyayam's short story *Pethavan: The Begetter*, created a change in the state after it was found to have foretold a real life tragedy in Dharmapuri in 2012, will soon be made available for global readers as a major publishing house is set to bring out the English translation as part of a novella series. As an interpreter of caste malady, Iyayam, a Dalit from the Vanniyar dominated pocket, has touched a raw nerve in some sections of society and has been a target of hate mails and threats from casteist politicians, who pick on his writings. The literary and intellectual worlds in Tamil Nadu, however, recognized his understanding of the prevalent caste dynamics, particularly in the context of matrimonial

alliances, after the death of the father of Divya, a Vanniyar girl who eloped with Ilavarasan, triggering a riot in November 2012. For the climax of *Pethavan*, which was published two months earlier, was similar.

Imayam's novella, *Pethavan* throws light on the ruthless 'honour killings' carried out by khap panchayats to oppose inter-caste marriages in Tamil Nadu. Of late, the word 'love' is turning out to be an unpleasant one with a section of society and is being perceived as the root cause of all pain. Worse, those falling in love are treated as 'criminals'.

Members of a political party who have been persistent in their demand to have an anti-Cupid crusade in society are to take a part of the blame. While the intellectual community is taking efforts to end the 'caste-centred anti-cupid crusade' at the ground level, there are some contributions being made in the literary arena too. A short story has now succeeded in creating tough opposing waves against this crusade.

Imayam's writings foreground intra-dalit strife and friction within Dalit community due to its internalization of hierarchical social structure. This could be viewed as a healthy dissonant voice, a corrective, selfcritical exploring of contemporary, non-homogenous society. Imayam's validation of Dravidian ideals in the context of Dalit women's lives, in particular in the domain of sexuality, is a notable exception to the pervasive critiquing of and dissociation from Dravidian ideology and its impact on prevailing caste equations and its role in silencing manipulating of early Dalit voices which we locate in contemporary Tamil Dalit discourse.

It got published in a well-known literary magazine *Uyirmai* in its September 2012 issue. Widening its reach with each passing day, this 26-page short-story (also called

Nedunkathai in Tamil) collection, which has been compiled into a single book, has sold over 18,000 copies till date. At a marriage function in Thiruvarur, around 1,200 copies of Imayam's book were distributed free of cost to the invitees. It is now being translated in Malayalam and Kannada.

In his story, Pethavan narrates the collapse of a poor Hindu family after a girl in the family gets involved in a love affair with a lower caste boy. The girl, Bakkiyam, also the lead character in the story, falls in love with Periyasamy, a Dalit boy, while at college. When their relationship comes to light, the upper caste families in the village oppose the relationship.

The couple attempt to elope from the village twice and both times, the villagers manage to stop them and brutally punish them by beating them up in public view. When the girl gets caught the third time while trying to elope with the guy, the villagers pass orders for a 'honour killing'. The panchayat assigns this task to the girl's father Palani himself. They also warn that if the girl is not killed, she will be raped and murdered by the villagers. To avoid such a horror, Palani, who was also ashamed by her act, agrees to kill his daughter.

However, paying heed to the fervent appeal from Bakkiyam's grandmother, mother and differently-abled sister, Palani decides to go against the panchayat's decision and plans to save her daughter instead. The night when the killing is scheduled, Bakkiyam's father helps her to escape from the village with Periyasamy. With their successful escape and with Palani ending his own life after making sure of his daughter's safety, the story comes to an end.

Throughout the story, Imayam brings out precedences of honour killings, quoting examples of the Kannagi-Murugesan pair, who were killed a decade ago for the same ‘inter-caste marriage’.

The unnamed political party plays a vital role in this story and instigates the villagers to engage in honour killing. Interestingly, the story was published after a political party leader’s alleged instigating speech on inter-caste marriage in April 2010 at Mamallapuram.

Interestingly, after this story was published there was a caste violence in Dharmapuri, over a love affair. Imayam tells about the pure co-incidence relating the story to the party’s anti-cupid crusade, that ours is an educated culture. But with such opposition to love, we have to think twice before terming it an educated one. In one interview Imayam tells about the Tamil culture in the following manner’

Tamil culture has always praised love affairs. But, our society today is caste-centric and not Tamil culture-centric. It is to be kept in mind that your daughter has every right to choose her partner. When you, as a parent, become a hindrance, it means you are violating her basic fundamental right. The demeanour activities of some parties are not just aimed at opposing love, but has also been used as a tool to build up a casteist society.

It has been said that they oppose love affairs happening between high caste and low caste people. But, will they be ready to accept a poor boy if he loves a rich girl from the same caste? Moreover, in general, it is seen that society accepts a relationship between an upper caste boy and a lower caste girl, opposes the relationship when it is between a lower caste boy and an upper caste girl. Only when reads this story and gets a bitter feel about the whole caste structure in society, the story can be said to have attained success.

Sivakami and Iyayam, the writers chosen for this study have their own way to express their voices of the disabled and depressed Dalits – the Paraiyars respectively through their literary creations. Both the Dalit writers focus on their wretchedness of Dalit life. Mukherjee tells about the Dalits life in our society like “There is in it [their works] ignorance, sexism, violence . . . competition for survival, drunkenness and death”(13). Sivakami and Iyayam, in their attempt to champion the cause of their brethren through their creative expressions are very successful.

The Dalit characters in both the writers works have been able to give an identity to the people whose existence the society has chosen to deny. And above all, they offer a human face to people who are denied the natural privileges of humanity, who are seen as a vast sea of people who are simply brushed aside as untouchables or people without a face, whom Gandhiji chose to call Harijans or children of God. A fact which gives a common idiom and a common message to Iyayam and Sivakami is their spontaneously unequivocal concern for their fellow beings as human beings.

They raise their clarion call against such social injustices and Dalit literature abounds with such writings. Under the able stewardship of Thanthai Periyar and Dr. Ambedkar, the Dalits started subverting from their subjugated position and fighting for their equal human rights of equality and freedom. Now the paradigms are shifting and each and every individual aspires to establish his identity.

Sivakami’s and Iyayam’s, works are not like a story of the individual’s tragedy. Instead it they are the stories of the Dalit struggle and they its relationship with authority and they produced a political reaction. It is provocative and unpalatable to the champions of the oppressive caste and class system. It bring about chaos into the hierarchical

relationship between the dominant and the dominated. Their language becomes the most crucial constituent of Dalit literature. The language should really give a violent disturbance to the seemingly natural posture and superficial orderliness of the status quo. Sivakami and Iyayya, have a different vocabulary and speech. They deliberately overstep what they are permitted to write, by the rules of the 'dominant' grammar.

Sivakami and Iyayya reveal in their novels social evils that arise on account of one's birth, economic condition, class division, and religious fanaticism. They both examine such fundamental issues in their novels, and their novels throw light on many complex aspects of life, which make the readers ruminate about them and wish for their eradication. Their outlook as well as understanding of society is almost identical, and their works contain their plea for human justice and equality. They have a missionary zeal of viewing the society in a perspective which offers scope for making full use of the inherent talents of people. Both aim at uplifting the standard of life both socially and economically.

The foremost problem treated by their novels is that of the socially oppressed. Both make the age-old injustice meted out to a class of people within traditional Hindu society as the central theme of their works, like Mulk Raj Anand had for his novel *Untouchable*. The choice of the theme itself shows the courage of the author because to take a sweeper as the hero of his novel is a revolutionary departure. Indian fiction was at that time a fiction about middle and high classes, and even when low class life entered into it, no writer could condescend to such a low level as to write about sweepers cleaning human excrements.

Paradoxically, in India the rich get richer and the poor poorer. To some extent, the caste system plays a major role in causing the rich-poor chasm. The upper castes are the landowning or factory-owning community and the lower caste happen to be the workers in their fields. The growing economic uncertainty in the nation camouflaged the caste divisions and gives rise to identification of people through their financial situation. The upper castes specifically Brahmins and Ksatriyas evolve into affluent class in modern India, while the Sudras and untouchables, owing to the menial nature of profession and the oppression by the upper castes, become the impoverished lower class. The havoc created by class system is in no way less than the havoc caused by caste system. Imayam and Sivakami, the writers chosen for the study, have in their own ways portrayed the predicament of these depressed classes of people, the Paraiyars through their literary creations. Both are Dalit writers and they focus on the wretchedness of Dalit life. Through the creation of their characters, they have been able to give an identity to the people whose existence, the society has chosen to deny. And above all, they offer a human face to these people who are denied even the basic rights as they are simply brushed aside as untouchables. Sivakami and Imayam's unequivocal concern for their fellow beings as human beings finds a common idiom and a common message in their works.

Sivakami and Imayam examine fundamental issues such as the economic condition, class division, and religious fanaticism in their novels and since their outlook as well as understanding of society are almost identical, they aim at uplifting the standard of life of the Dalits both socially and economically.

The present study is an attempt to examine issues related to the Dalit community in selected works of Sivakami and Imayam.

Hypothesis:

- Dalit literature is a symbol of change and revolution.
- Through their works, Sivakami and Imayam have given voice to all unheard sorrows, sufferings and agonies of the Dalits.
- The writers express their hope that their voice would be heard.
- Dalit liberation would lead to their Empowerment.

Thesis statement:

The novelists Sivakami and Imayam through their works have portrayed the predicament of the Dalit community. The present study is an attempt to examine the ways in which the works of these writers portray the life of the Dalits especially Dalit women and how they prove to be not only literature of protest but also literature of hope.

The aims of the present research study are:

- To discuss the place of Dalits in society.
- To examine how they try to protest against the oppressive system.
- To study ways in which empowerment is possible.
- To explore the representative narrative techniques used by the writers.
- To emphasize the need to treat all human beings with equal dignity.

The researcher has taken the translated novels of two writers Sivakami and Imayam who deal with the Dalits and their suffering thus giving an expression and a voice to the voiceless. The work entitled “ From Limits to Liminal Spaces: A Study of Select Works of Sivakami and Imayam,” deals with the translated works of these writers.

The works taken up for the study are Sivakami's *The Grip of Change, The Taming of Women* and *Cross Section* and Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*.

From time immemorial, Tamil literature, particularly Tamil fiction, has been a motivating force in the lives of the Tamil-speaking people. In spite of its rich traditional and human values and its incomparable quality, it has remained in the dark because of the non-availability of many of its works in English translation. Hence, many scholars and the reading public speaking other languages are still unaware of its real merits and richness.

The present study consists of five chapters including introduction and conclusion. The first chapter gives a brief introduction to a few of contemporary Dalit writers and their works the life and works of the writers taken for the study namely Sivakami and Imayam, their main themes – the life of the Dalit and the sufferings and struggles of the Dalit women, and the significant place occupied by Sivakami and Imayam in Dalit literature.

Chapter two “Silence of the Sidelines” discusses how patriarchy makes itself evident in various forms of discriminations, inequalities, hierarchies, inferior status and position of women in society. Patriarchy is not constant as gender relations which are dynamic and complex have changed over a period of history. Gender oppression is often linked with oppressions based on caste, class, community, tribe and religion in Indian society and in such a society the patriarch is the principal oppressor. Caste, class and gender discrimination prevent Dalit women from enjoying their basic human rights particularly equality and dignity.

Sivakami's and Imayam's writings point out that the Dalit women are more prone to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault, and physical violence at

work places and in public. Both novelists expose how the upper caste landlords in the villages sexually abuse the Dalit women. Like the novels of Om Prakash Valmiki, Tony Morrison, Lorraine Hansberry and Alice Walker the works of these writers also deal with the discrimination between the rich and the poor and the upper caste and the lower caste people.

Chapter three “Voice of the Voiceless” discusses how Dalit literature is a protest literature. It gives voice to those whose voices were suppressed for a long period of time. There are many qualified wordsmiths 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.

Sivakami in her novel *The Taming of Women* portrays her village; the overt demarcation of zone of purity and pollution lead to a strong articulation of Dalit status. But once the Dalit woman gains her liberation and ventures to the world outside the village she finds that caste identity is most often unstated and that she must learn to decode gestures and look around to know how deeply caste discrimination still operates.

Imayam talks about how society thinks and treats Dalits in his novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*. 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?’”(116).

When the Dalit writers felt the need to express themselves, they could only turn inward and talk about their own experiences. Autobiography thus becomes a fitting vehicle for their expression and their portrayal of the life of a Dalit individual becomes

representative of an entire community. In the novel *Beasts of Burden*, writer Imayam suggests remedies to ameliorate the condition of the Dalit women. Women are the victims in the patriarchal society. “Do you think it’s enough for you . . . 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?” (79).

Chapter four “Braving the Barriers” deals with the empowerment of Dalits. Though caste discrimination is a menace which is plaguing the society even today, there are certain ways through which the Dalits can be empowered. Empowerment is possible through their education and unity.

Chapter five is a summary of the arguments of the previous chapters. It discusses how the Dalit writers Sivakami and Imayam have manifested in their works – the despair, dejection and suffering of the Dalit – the submissive servitude of the Dalit women, the carnal desire of men, the prejudice imposed on the lower caste women, the habit of being blind to the crimes and sins of the upper caste men and women, the self-centered attitude of the leaders, the burning flame of intra-Dalit strife, the fear and torments faced by the women, their anxiety about their future, and the incurable need for a revolutionary leader.

Though the novelists have explored the darker side of the marginalized society, they also have presented its gleaming brighter side. They have given possible solutions for the persisting plague of the caste-discrimination, slavery, intra-Dalit strife and poverty, which should consist of Dalit unity, good leadership and education. Both the writers have indicated the inevitability of accepting and welcoming change in the lives of the Dalits and also in the society.

Freedom or independence is not given, but achieved. It is time that the Dalits realized this with their hopes and dreams in their eyes and heart. All they have to do is to step forward without fear, welcoming the change of getting their dream fulfilled and their becoming empowered. Dalit literature serves as a lighthouse in directing the Dalits. It is not only a literature of protest but also of humaneness. The popularity and acceptance of Dalit literature itself signifies the progress of the Dalits at large.

“Man’s history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man” (614) says Tagore. He has indeed welcomed the outcast for the nation’s progress and prosperity of the Motherland through the progress and the prosperity of the children of the motherland.