

Chapter-IV

Marginalization

CHAPTER IV

MARGINALIZATION

Victor Turner's view regarding who marginals are is quoted by Aston in the book *Dalit Literature and African-American Literature*;

Marginals are simultaneous members (by ascription, optation, self – definition or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definitions and culture norms are distinct from and often opposed to one another. What is interesting about these marginal is that they often look to their group of origin, the so-called inferior groups, for communities and to the more prestigious group in which they aspire to higher status as their structural reference group. (6)

The form and nature of marginality depends upon the degree of impoverishment – economic, social or cultural. Marginality based upon caste, creed, religion or race is a kind of disability or affliction. The root cause of marginality could be injustice or exploitation. Marginality is an experience affecting people throughout the world. Being poor and unemployed, the Dalits are discriminated against and are disabled by a society that won't work around the problems of impairment. This chapter focuses on Dalit marginalization as the communities insult and ill-treat the people of lower castes as reflected in the two novels of P.Sivakami _ *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*.

Due to social marginalization, the Dalits undergo social oppression, exclusion, vulnerability or discrimination. Marginalization is a slippery and multilayered concept and whole societies can be marginalized at the global level and communities can be

marginalized from the dominant social order. Similarly Dalit groups and lower classes by upper classes and Black by the White. It is worthwhile to make a note of the poem of Bansode given in the book *Dalit literature: A Critical Exploration*,

Where the wind treats us as strangers,
 Where the monsoons give us only famines,
 Where the water plays with us,
 The most inhumane game of mirage.
 We are rejecting this
 Unclean and poisonous life.(45)

So to be heard, one has to speak; to be answered one has to question; and to be recognized, one has to speak louder. Like Bansode's, Sivakami's voice is also loud and clear; sonorous and sound; it is not only heard by one but all. She has raised her voice not only for herself but also for her multitude that are unseen and unheard. Sivakami emphasizes that no region is free from the menace of inequality. In an article published in *The Hindu* she said, "Tell me which constituency is not communally sensitive? The problem persists across the country. If it is not religion, it is caste. This should change; the last ten years the world has changed a lot and you cannot afford to remain unchanged"(7). *The Grip of Change* is indeed powerful enough to speak this truth for itself.

Sivakami's book *The Grip of Change* gleams with the spirit of hope and change as it tries to accelerate the morale embedded deep inside the heart of the Dalits. The novel opens with the exploitation of the low caste Paraya woman, Thangam, wife of Kaipillai. She had been betrayed and cheated out of her inheritance by her brother-in-law, after her husband's death. Her circumstances cornered her in such a way that she had to bend and

succumb to the carnal pleasure of the 'high'- caste land owner, Paranjothi Udayar. She appealed to Kathamuthu, the leader of the Parayar community, for justice. The domineering Kathamuthu, who had been a Panchayat president, managed to get justice for Thangam though he had his own selfish motives in dealing with the case. What Sivakami portrays is not something unreal as

Mukta Mittal points out in her book *Dalit Women in India: Survival and Current Dilemma* are very pertinent in this context.

Even today, in modern times, we see the severe oppression and exploitation of Dalit women. Dalit women face multiple oppression that violates their economic, political, social and cultural rights. The most deprived section of society comprises Dalit women who are poor, illustrate and easy targets for sexual harassment. They face not just caste violence inflicted by the dominant castes, but also state violence.(35)

The affairs between a low-caste woman and a high - caste man provoked a bitter conflict between the upper and lower caste people. The clash led to a series of events such as bribing the police, boycotting the services of the Parayars in order to break their movement and even burning the settlement of the Dalits. The second book of the novel *The Grip of Change* consists of the author's note which projects a caste- driven society where humiliation and discrimination have become the order of the day. *The Grip of Change* is not only a novel about caste-discrimination but it also unveils the truth that caste can be used as an axis along with power which can be exercised. Thus the novel retains the humility of the oppressed.

Sivakami's novels can be compared with the novels of Om Prakash, Valmiki, Tony Morrison and Alice Walker which also deal with the discrimination between the black and

white and uppercaste and lower caste people and the condition of the oppressed. Toni Morrison, the eminent African American woman writer envisions the black women as the new emancipated subaltern women; they are the ships sailing into new horizons and as safe harbours they provide a heaven for the black culture and tradition. Toni Morrison like Alice Walker, her contemporary, expresses her desire in her work *Sula* that the black women through their friendship and solidarity must, “re-possess, re-name and re-own their culture bonds”(8). They should realize that the definition of self must come from within and that they should be self-reliant, independent and individualistic. Similarly the Dalit women writers like Sivakami and Bama also raise a clarion call for the upliftment of their Dalit counterparts. Dalit women also must create gender and caste equity by subverting from the dynamics of caste and transcend the interstices of identity.

Various external and internal factors influence the evolution of selfhood. The development of self depends on physical and cultural environments externally and biological and psychological factors internally: Regarding the relationship between culture and self, Toni Morrison says in *The Bluest Eye*, “culture and self are reciprocally related phenomena. Culture has both external and internal representation. Externally it is represented by various institutions- familial, educational, political, religious and economic artefacts. Internally it is represented by various values, belief systems, world views and epistemologies” (288).

This definition offers myriad possibilities in the evolution of self depending on the external and internal factors. Evolution of self is tremendously significant for the African American and Dalit women than the others because of their predicament as the oppressed of the oppressed and the slave of the slave. The black man suffers under his white master and in turn, he retaliates it not on his white boss, but on the poor, black female within

home, little realizing that he is subjugating his own class and race. So the black woman is de-humanized not only by inter-racial oppression but also by intra-racial oppression. Hence the black woman suffers under the triple burden of race, gender and class as the poor, black female. In this point of view Alice Walker lists many of the dominant stereotypes that have been applied to Black women since slavery,

Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "the mule of the world," because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else refused to carry. We have also been called "Matriarchs," "Superwomen," and "Mean and Evil Bitches." Not to mention "Castraters" and "Sapphire's Mama."(61)

If the black women suffer under the triple oppression of race, gender and class as the poor, black female, the Dalit woman reels under the triple oppression of caste, gender and class as the poor, Dalit female. Countries and culture may be entirely different but the prejudices that are prevailing against human beings are common and deep rooted. Wherever they may be the Dalits are marginalized as untouchables, discriminated against and denied even their basic human rights. Morrison and Sivakami depict the liberated woman through their works. *Sula* of Morrison deals with individual rights in general and women's rights in particular. Even today the black women do not have complete freedom and remain passive. Their white counterparts look down upon them as inferiors; moreover they are also branded as bad women. Sivakami reflects the same thought when she laments in *The Grip of Change : Author's Notes*, "recollections caused old wounds to bleed, as though salt had been rubbed on them." (144). Likewise, Toni Morrison in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* poignantly depicts this anguish which is quoted here extensively for a better understanding of the situation as well as position of the suppressed.

Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders.

White women said, “Do this”. White children said, “give me that”.

White men said “come here”. Black men said “Lay down” . . . But they took all of that and re-created it in their own image. They ran the house of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men they cleared up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other. The hands that felled trees also cut umbilical cords; the hands that wrung the necks of children and bugged hogs also nudged African violets into bloom; the arms that loaded sheaves, bales and sacks rocked babies into sleep. They parted biscuits into flaky ovals of innocence - and shrouded the dead. They plowed all day and came home so nestle like plums under the limbs of their men. The legs that straddled a mule black were the same ones that straddled their man’s hips. And the difference was all the Different there was.(108)

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

conveys the significance of the grip of change through the withered, blooming, and budding jasmine flowers:

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

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

Om Prakash Valmiki, an acclaimed poet and literary critic in Hindi, was born in the Chuhra caste. He grew up in Barla, a hamlet located in west Uttar Pradesh. His struggle to survive in this world of humiliation and oppression is depicted in his novel, *Joothan*. In his review of the novel Narayan Badri says that it "is an autobiographical account of Valmiki's journey from his birth and upbringing as an untouchable in the newly independent India of the fifties to his present as a Dalit" (93). It is the autobiographical story of his painful growing up, continual struggle for survival in this caste - ridden society. In *Joothan*, the chuhras, the Dalits that the writer belonged to lived in the Chuhra basti. They were poor and they did not have proper clothes to wear. He describes the reapers from the untouchable castes of the chuhras or chamars in *Joothan*, : "They had clothes on their bodies in name only" (8). They did not have enough food to eat so the narrator and his

family relied on the leftovers from the caste - Hindu families. The narrator Narayan in *Joothan* says that they would:

. . . sit outside with huge baskets, waiting to collect the dirty *pattals* or leaf Plates to save the *Joothan*- pieces of *pooris*, bits of sweetmeats, and a little bit of vegetable-sticking to them. The bridegroom's guests who didn't leave enough scrape on their *pattals* were denounced as gluttons. The pieces of *pooris* that were collected from the *pattals* were dried in the sun. A cloth would be spread on a *charpai* to dry them. Valmiki was often placed on guard duty because the drying *pooris* attracted crows, dogs and hen.(38)

The living condition of the people was very poor. They did not have a proper shelter. Valmiki vividly recounts those days of the rainy season that made life in the Dalit dwelling more miserable. He narrates with pain how they had to walk in the slush of pig's excrement to reach their huts. The readers are quite appalled when they read about the well in their *basti* that was "full of long worms during the rainy season"(20). They did not have any other alternative but to drink the water.

The wide range of nomenclatures attributed to Dalits speaks for their socially known disabilities irrespective of the laws enacted for their protection and welfare. Ironically, majority of the oppressed classes remain the same. A study of the Indian society enumerates the widely known disabilities of the Dalits as: social, economic, political, religious and educational. The geographical limit disconnects the Dalit writers and their life styles; the traumatic experiences of the Dalits are identical. Valmiki from the north of India and Sivakami from the south document almost the same kind of experiences in their literary creations. A comparative study of such novels may tell us more about the various disabilities of the Dalits and about the oppression they undergo in their lives. Valmiki

devotes considerable attention to sketching the vexing experiences of the Dalits etched out on his mind as a child in his novel. Worse was the condition of the students during the examination when they were not able to drink water like others. The students had to face the ignominy of hailing from a lower caste. Nothing can spare them from it because their stay in the Bastis, the chuhras, their unpaid job of disposing the cattle, and above all the frequent taunts of their own teachers confirmed it.

Through their literary creations Sivakami and Valmiki, have in their own way augmented the voices of the oppressed-the parayars and the chauhras respectively. Sharankumar Limbale brings out the wretchedness of Dalit life in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature*;

There is in it ignorance, sexism, violence, internal rivalry and conflict, competition for survival, drunkenness and death. Authentic representation, then, involves an unromanticized and unpitying reflection in literature of the materiality of Dalit life in all its dimensions. Dalit (auto) biographical and fictional narratives and poetry neither hide nor romanticize anything. The people that inhabit these texts are not objects of pity. Their life is often miserable, humiliating, and filled with daily reminders of their impurity and pollutedness .(13)

Their attempt to champion the cause of their people through creative expressions is indeed successful. When Valmiki in *Joothan* achieves it through an autobiographical narrative that deals with several incidents of subjugation and embarrassment, Sivakami throws light on the afflictions imposed on the female Dalit student at home.

The Grip of Change and *The Taming of Women* have dealt with the sorrows, slavery, trials and tribulations, despair and degradation, powerlessness and poverty of the Dalits. The two novels are one lofty image of the grief of Dalits who are devoid of the

inevitable essentials such as liberty, honours, justice, education, security, rights and freedom. If the pain of the dalits has been born from the womb of rejection, then the corollary of pain, hope has to spring from the heart of revolution.

When Thangam has been assaulted by being pulled up by hair, dragged out to the street, flogged with a stick and accused of having an affair with Paranjothi Udayar, Gowri with deep despair states,

‘My husband’s relatives spread the story that I had become Paranjothi’s concubine. That’s why Paranjothi’s wife’s brothers and her brother-in-law, four men, entered my house last night. They pulled me by my hair and dragged me out to the street. They hit me, and flogged me with a stick stout as a hand. They nearly killed me. No one in the village, none of my relatives, came to help me. I begged for mercy, but they wouldn’t stop. They abused me and threatened to kill me if I stayed in that village any longer. They called me a whore.’(6)

The words that have been ringing in the mind of Sivakami have acquired form and shape and it is delivered by Gowri. Since the Dalits have lost their identity for generations, they are unable to identify themselves in the multitude of matters, except through caste. They design their character through caste. They call themselves by the name of their caste. This is evident in *The Grip of Change* when Thangam introduced herself to the inspector of police, “I am a poor Parayar, an orphan, a widow. I earn my living by working for a daily wage”(11).

Discrimination is a disease that has plagued the Dalits from time immemorial. Marginalization has made them live their life at the mercy of those who don’t own them. They are thrown out as garbage, after the essence of life has been squeezed out of them.

They live, they breathe and work just to escape from the monstrous clutch of poverty and starvation. Caste has become a boon and a bane for the Dalits. When a Dalit is abused, he or she is given prominence and the issues are dealt in terms of caste and not in terms of an individual. When Thangam was molested by Paranjothi Udayar a compensation of rupees ten thousand was given to Thangam, since she was a lower caste woman and not because she had been seduced violently or she was a woman. Here caste has been used as a bait to acquire material and money. Since they are not able to gain money, they use these strategies to gain profit in a crooked way. This attitude becomes a stumbling block in their advancement.

When Kathamuthu was elected as a member of legislative assembly, the Tahsildar of the village failed to offer him a seat. The Tahsildar, the village officer grumbled about being forced to treat Kathamuthu, who was a Parayan as his equal. When Kathamuthu had reported this to the Thanjavur collector, who was his friend, the collector advised Kathamuthu to beat the Tahsildar with his slipper. As per the instruction of the collector, Kathamuthu hurried with a gang of men to the Tahsildar's office and the gang of men taught him a good lesson asking him, "so you called him a Parayan? You couldn't spare a chair for him?"(140).

When power is bestowed upon the Dalits, due to the enthusiasm of gaining power, they misuse it or they use it so unjustly that the bestowing of power in itself seems unjust. Dalits react like the rubber balls which bounce back with the same force after being hit. The air in the rubber ball is like the power given to them. The power and the pain that has been caused during the hit make them bounce back. In *Karukku* , Bama states,

Life is difficult if you happen to be poor, even through you are born into the Upper caste. When this is the case, the condition of those who are

born into the Parayar community, as the poorest of the poor, struggling for daily survival doesn't need spelling out. Such people have just enough time, if they wake up well before cock-crow, to sweep their front yard, collect water, Swallow some gruel if possible, and rush off to work as beat as they can. (68)

The Dalit's condition and state are measured mainly through the outward appearance. The Dalits should be aware of their attitude and the way of talking and dressing in the society. The lines taken from the poem "Mohandas Karamchand" in Meena Kandasamy's book *Touch* is appropriate to be mentioned here.

you knew, you bloody well knew,
 caste won't go, they wouldn't let it go.
 It haunts us now, the way you do
 with a spookystick, an eerie laugh or two.(21-22)

Thus caste has great influence in the life of the poor. The poverty of the poor is like an epidemic that has paralyzed the host. The caste system has denied these people the right to self-assertion and human dignity. Oppression and injustice are the gifts given by caste-discrimination to the untouchable life. The touch of poverty and misery is so much felt by them that the miserable lots are not able to make out a living without them. Resistance and revolt are the two sides of the coin of caste oppression. An analogy can be seen in Bama's *Karukku* .

In this society if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste

difference does not disappear wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find a way to study well and progress like everyone else. And this is why a wretched like style is all that is left to us. If you are born into a low caste, every movement of your life is a movement of struggle.(23-24)

This fact is beautifully portrayed through the incident that happened during Gowri's college life. Gowri had been a sincere, industrious and talented student who was yet to know the ways of the world.

She had been active in the students association in college. An oratorical contest had been conducted and she had been in charge of putting together the marks given by three different judges. One of the contestants had wanted to know the marks before the results could be announced. When she had refused to reveal the marks, the contestant had walked away after calling her a 'Scheduled caste bitch'. The contest had nothing to do with the caste system. She was left wondering why men and women of the upper castes were governed so strongly by caste and employed it to abuse others at every possible opportunity. Perhaps the novelist had been affected by such prejudices. (140-41)

In Iyayam's novel *Beasts of Burden*, the character Arokkyam describes his condition when he becomes old like a skeleton, with loose wrinkled skin like an empty bag, he has dreamed a bad dream - the death of a young person. He recalls his past life and is scared of the dream. Arokkyam's pathetic condition is described in the following manner;

All my life's struggle is to fill the belly
 Like a donkey I carried bundle after bundle
 Night and day I carried my vessel and stood in
 Front of every house
 It's all in aid of this stomach
 All the abused and bad words thrown at me
 It's all for this belly
 It's like an ocean that can never be filled
 Even if I struggle all my life, I'll never fill it
 All that I have suffered was for its sake
 But my belly is never full
 For fifty years I've walked between Thorapaadu and
 Colony to earn my food
 What am I but my stomach
 The world its stomach?.(295-96)

The condition of Arokkyam is more or less the same condition of most of the Dalits. Dalits have to struggle a lot for filling their belly. In their quest for food, they lose their identity. Having concentrated more on their belly they have forgotten the idea of betterment. Filling their belly doesn't fulfill their life. The condition of the Dalits can be witnessed through the words of Madhukant Kalpit's poem "*Amadavad*" quoted by Prasad.

Crushed under the road roller

of inhuman behaviour

The ugly face of my tragic history . . . (109).

In addition to the marginalization of the Dalits, suppression and women intra-dalit strife are other issues on which light has been thrown upon in both the novels of Sivakami. Even Bama's third novel, *Vanmam* argues for forging of better unity among Dalit groups avoiding intra-dalit strife. These novels bring out the idea that the intra-dalit strife strengthens the domineering spirit of the upper caste people and the politicians. There are hierarchies that exist even among the lower castes. Intra-dalit strife is well illustrated even in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* in which the upper caste Udayars have burnt the huts of the Parayars and the Chakkiliyars, for lodging complaint against Paranjothi Udayar for illtreating Thangam. When the Chakkiliyar's houses are burnt, Ponnusamy from the Chakkiliyar street asks, "they set fire to Parayar houses because you chased their men away and stopped going to work. But what did we do? Why were our houses also burned down?" (61-62). This shows that the Dalits lack care and concern even for their own group of people. They want to live their own life comfortably and safely without any regard for the life of others. Bothering about one's own belly is another reason behind the intra-dalit strife.

'You thought, "Let the Parayars deal with their fate," and went

to work for Udayar, now you can see how you've been paid for that. For us, Parayan, Pallan, Chakkiliyan, Valluvan and Vannan may be different. For them, we are the same –all untouchables. Do you think they would make *us* stand outside their houses and take *you* inside and feed you milk and rice?

As long as we continue to differentiate among ourselves and beg for their

favour, they will continue to manoeuvre and hammer us into submission.’

(62)

Sivakami’s novels portray the rustic story of the conflicts and struggles between tenacious women and tyrannical men in the contemporary society. The central male characters, Periyannan and Kathamuthu in the novels *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* lived in the poor villages; both are not only hungry for the power that money could bring them but also tyrannical in their treatment of the women in their life, be it their wife or their old and ailing mother or their daughter or the other women for whom they had an insatiable appetite. The opening chapter of the novel *The Taming of Women* is introduced with a bang. Periyannan’s wife Anandhayi was in labour while he had another woman to sleep with him upstairs, brought to him by the midwife with whom too, Periyannan often had physical connection. The male domination in a woman’s life is brought out clearly in this novel. Anandhayi had no illusions about him, she wished however, that he would not get his women home. The physical violence they saw and are subjected to on the basis of their being Dalits made one daughter Dhanam, a rebel, while the other Kala became apathetic. Periyannan was the king of all he surveyed under his control. Periyannan married Lakshmi, whom he got home as his second wife. She did not sit well with Periyannan, who saw it as a blow to his egotism. He too risked everything like his wealth, respect, work and status in his attempt to gain control over Lakshmi.

Sivakami brings women of many generations in her novel *The Grip of Change*. The character Kathamuthu is an example of the tyrannical and charismatic male characters who always tries to bring everyone under his control. The novel for the most part portrays the discrimination between men and women in the small village especially the sexual violation against Dalit women which has been seen as something natural and spontaneous. Dalit girls

are not allowed to attend schools after attaining puberty and are subjected to sexual assaults by much older husbands, are sexually harassed or raped by fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law if they are widowed; they are subjected to regular beating by alcoholic husbands, and are burdened with heavy labour at home and also in the fields apart from nurturing their numerous children. The ignorant Dalits do not recognize the importance of educating women. Even in *The Grip of Change* Thangam was seduced by an upper caste Udayar and she is beaten on the street by his brother and brother-in-law. She had been insulted and had been dragged on the road. She was cursed and ill-treated for a mistake she hadn't committed. Her sister-in-law, Valliammai indeed took pleasure in abusing her, " 'They beat her up. Good! Why did they leave her alive? That whore thinks too much of herself. She thinks that she's very beautiful. That's why she went after that Udayar. When she loses her shape, he'll throw her out, and she,'ll be in a state worse than a dog's' "(28).

The main woman character in the novel *The Taming of Women* is the industrious Anandhayi married to the womanizer Periyannan. The characters in the novel like Anandhayi and her mother-in-law, Chinnasami and Lakshmi are infused with originality. These men preferred to possess women as concubines or in order to assert their virility or to teach a lesson to their legally wedded wife or simply because they lusted after women. It is of much significance, however, that such women happen to be always poor, without any social support and are either widows or abandoned by their husbands. The representation of the other women is a significant entry point to the discussion of power relations within a Dalit community. Such a woman is an obvious victim of male power. "Even before he was done speaking, he grabbed a bunch of her hair. 'Heck, let go . . .' She initially tried to break free. Then she let her hair remain like a goat ready to be sacrificed on Deepavali. He

rolled her head around as if it were a pestle and then let go after a few abusive words”(140).

Through these two novels Sivakami portrays the painful real life of women suffering at the hands of men. The man who has committed a crime by harassing a woman has no feeling of guilt. The men conveniently blame the women, making them feel as if they are worthless and pitiable. Both Chadayam and Paranjothi Udayar thought that the women are born only to satisfy their carnal pleasures and to serve them.

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

Even Sivakami in *The Grip of Change* portrays Kathamuthu as a domineering dalit, usurping the rights of others. Only a selfless person can lead a community and can lift it up, whereas Kathamuthu proved himself to be a self-made leader disregarding the needs of his own people. He profited himself in the name of helping his people; when an elderly man requested Kathamuthu to make arrangement for the loans in the co-operative society, Kathamuthu replies,

That’s my main job, isn’t it? I have no other work! Do you know when I had breakfast yesterday? At nine in the morning! After that I had to bathe and leave for the police station. I just got half an hour’s rest after lunch. Every day something or the other happens and I have to skip breakfast or lunch. My health is spoiled. And I have to work on my land too. You spend all your time in your fields and enjoy the benefit. You have fresh vegetables,

fruits. Look at me. I can't pay any attention to agriculture. I have to go every day to the vegetable shop to buy stale, not fresh, food. I have no money to educate my daughter. The rules of the cooperative society are such that without cooking up accounts you can't get a loan-all that takes money. And if I keep doing your work how will I make a living? (36)

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

It wasn't simply that the upper castes exploit the lower castes. A lower caste leader might exploit his own people. It is not only upper caste men who prey upon lower caste women. Men like Kathamuthu are perfectly capable of taking advantage of vulnerable women. The overall picture presented by the novel is that rich or poor, upper caste or lower caste, the seeds of corruption exist at all levels.(149)

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

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

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

Hey Brother Break the Begging bowl

Do not extend hand for begging

By begging the Rights cannot achieved

Change the history

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

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

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

She hated the memory of Udayar's sexual use of her body. Once she used to plait her long hair, but she no longer bothered with that. She pinned it up without any care and covered her head with her sari.(87)

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

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

but the crimes of passion
 our passion
 your crimes
 poured poison and pesticide the ears-nose-mouth
 or hanged them in public
 because a man and woman
 dare to love
 and you wanted
 to teach

other boys and other girls

the lessons of

how to

whom to

when to

where to

continue their caste lines.(60-62)

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

Darshana Trivedi in volume-1 of *Multicultural Literature in India: Critical Perceptions* says about what the Dalit writers could achieve with Dalit literature;

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