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**Double Marginalization of Dalit Women in
Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of
Women***

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The present paper aims at analyzing the Double Marginalization of Dalit Women in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women*. The form and nature of marginality depends upon the degree of economic, social or cultural impoverishment. Marginality, based upon caste, creed, religion or race is a kind of disability or affliction and its root cause could be injustice or exploitation. The poor and unemployed Dalits are discriminated against and disabled by a society which is caste-ridden and hence is unconcerned about the problems of impairment. The present paper focuses on the marginalization of Dalit women as reflected in the novels of P. Sivakami as the communities insult and ill – treat the women of lower castes first because of their caste and then because they are women in a patriarchal society.

The selected two novels of Sivakami deal with the sorrows and sufferings, trials and tribulations, despair and degradation, poverty and powerlessness of the Dalits. The novels are one lofty image of the grief of Dalits especially the women who are devoid of the inevitable essentials such as human dignity, liberty, honour, justice, education and security. Gowri in *The Grip of Change* and Anandhayi in *The Taming of Women* suffer and are denied their rightful place in the society. If the pain of the Dalits has been born from the womb of rejection, then hope, the corollary of pain, has to spring from the heart of revolution and Sivakami's women who suffer because of the pain inflicted on them by the so-called upper caste people fight with the spirit of hope and try to change the society.

Sivakami, the 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.

P.Sivakami, born in 1957, is a post graduate in History. Later she took up IAS exams as she thought that she would gain wealth and status in the society by coming to such high position. She got through her exams, but considered writing as her first priority. She derived a lot of pleasure from reading and writing. So even after becoming an IAS officer, she continued writing. She became a full time writer in 2008 after taking voluntary retirement from Government Service. From then on, she has been working for the upliftment of the Dalits. She is the first Tamil Dalit Woman to write a novel *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum* in 1989. A literary and commercial success, the novel created a stir by taking on patriarchy in the Dalit movement. The novel is translated by the author herself and published in English as *The Grip of Change* (2006). The second novel *Anandhayi* is about the violent treatment of women. The novel is translated by Pritham K Chakravarthy as *The Taming of Women* (2011). Sivakami has written four critically acclaimed novels, all of them centred on Dalit and Feminist themes. She has written numerous short stories and poems focusing on similar issues.

Sivakami's novels portray the rustic story of women who suffer at the hands of men who strongly believe in and stand for patriarchy. The conflicts and struggles are 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 wives or their old and ailing mothers or their daughters 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 taken 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, though she wished, that he would not get his women home. The physical violence the women saw and are subjected to on the basis of their being Dalits, made one daughter Dhanam, a rebel, while the other daughter

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. His desire for Lakshmi was so much that he did not mind risking everything he had – his wealth, respect, work and status in his attempt to gain control over Lakshmi. When she did not act according to his wishes, Periyannan was much hurt; he saw it as a blow to his egotism. Driven by such madness he assaulted her violently and drives her to the point of suicide.

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 try to bring everyone under 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. The Dalit girls are not allowed to attend schools after attaining puberty; the young women are subjected to sexual assaults by much older husbands, or 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 loads of work 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 was 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. What could such helpless women do, when their own sisters betrayed them? 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 and her mother-in-law, Chinnasami and Lakshmi are infused with originality. These men preferred to have contact with many women as they considered that as a matter of pride. The women were hept by them 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. Lakshmi suffered pain and humiliation because of the treatment given by both the father and the son. “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 women suffer double marginalization because they suffer as they belong to the lower class and the suffering is augmented because of the patriarchal system. 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. Men like 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 of the novel *-The Grip of Change* is worth mentioning 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. Sivakami says in *The Grip of Change*:

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 inevitable part of an untouchable's life, especially the Dalit woman, 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 Thangam 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 sorrows and 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.

The women in the two novels suffer because they are women, because they are poor, and because they are Dalits. Sivakami's novels gleam with the spirit of hope and change and also try to accelerate the morale embedded deep inside the heart of the Dalits. The selected two novels of Sivakami deal with the sorrows and sufferings, trials and tribulations, despair and degradation, poverty and powerlessness of the Dalits. The novels are one lofty image of the grief of Dalits especially the women who are devoid of the inevitable essentials such as human dignity, liberty, honour, justice, education and security. Though Kanagavalli and other women in *The Grip of Change* and Anandhayi in *The Taming of Women* suffer and are denied their rightful place in the society, there are some points where they express that they cannot put up with sufferings endlessly. Through the portrayal of Gowri in *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami has shown how in spite of all odds they rise up in their life having their own dreams. When all unite together and stand for their rights and make others understand that they too are human beings with their own dignity and rights to lead their life on earth, the realization of the dream of universal brotherhood will not be faraway.

The Dalit writers or Dalit literature as such could contribute towards establishing a world which will have place for all to live in harmony. Darshana Trivedi in *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)

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The Ignored Irish Speak in Mary Gordon's *The Other Side*

- Raichel M. Sylus

Abstract: Women writers have a major share in American literature. Society and culture have played a major role in changing their roles from just a wife, into any field of their choice. Amidst a range of tension and war, they still emerge triumphant in penning down what they feel and think, thanks to the innate creative spirit in them. *The Other Side*, as the name indicates, is the name by which the Irish immigrants referred to the promised land across the Atlantic. It is the only novel of Gordon set entirely on the immigrant experiences of the Irish.

Keywords: American women writers, Irish immigrants, identity.

American literature is multi ethnic in nature due to its vast immigrant settlers forming the core of its population. It is the melting pot of the world since people from all over the globe have a feel and touch of the culture, language and vastness of this country. According to the words of Mark Twain and Benjamin Franklin, America is what "We [they] built America out of different races and the process made us [them] Americans" (Singh 296). We have a variety of literatures since people across the world gather here for various reasons. Though there may be Americans in general i.e., the Native Americans, there are Jewish Americans, Irish Americans, Latin Americans, Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans who come under one major banner – the Americans. Hence there have been new voices every year from various parts of the world to form various sub-genres of American literature. The Irish Americans are different from the other groups mentioned above. The Irish Americans are Americans who trace their origin and ancestry to Ireland and most of whom have stepped into an alien soil due to the Potato Famine which eroded the people and their land. It was a mass of Irish Americans that descended on the unknown continent that it "became an ethnic community within an ethnic community". Irish people wanted to consider themselves as distinctive people among all the other ethnic groups in America. Yes, they are and they have proved their might through the various deeds in the alien land. Down the years there have been many Irish American Presidents who have had their Irish roots. *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History* points out that "By the time John F. Kennedy was elected in 1960, Irish occupational status exceeded national averages and was higher than every other white ethnic group except the Jews". (Meagher, Timothy J.) It is no wonder that they dominate among the other immigrants though they entered the country with hardly any means for their survival. In this context, it is essential that we talk about an Irish American writer of the present day. While American writers are in galore, Irish American writers are not highlighted because they come under the common purview of American

literature. *Outsiders Inside* by Bronwen Walter points out that:

The scattering of Irish people has been on an extraordinary scale in the wake of the catastrophe of the Famine in 1840s. They and their descendants have become embedded in two of the largest industrial economies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; those of Britain and the United States, in ways that have hardly begun to be recognized (1)

It is true that it was a huge mass that left Ireland in search of greener pastures. This is another huge Diaspora, an exodus as that of the Israelites towards the promised land of Canaan. Women writers have a major share in American literature. Society and culture have played a major role in changing their roles from just a wife, into any field of their choice. Amidst a range of tension and war, they still emerge triumphant in penning down what they feel and think, thanks to the innate creative spirit in them. They are no more docile and passive, but dominant and active changing their course as per the norms of the day. It is to be appreciated that American women writers, writing about women, weave a dense and complicated narrative of contemporary issues. Irish American women writers are not many in number. One among them is Mary Gordon, the 2008 New York State Author who has etched herself in this field to bring to light the plight of the Irish Americans. Mary Gordon, an acclaimed prose writer and well-known novelist has six novels, two collections of short stories, two memoirs, a novella, and an essay to her credit and is currently working on a book *Reading Jesus*. Gordon, hailing from a staunch Catholic background has mapped her identity in all her works. Having a mixed background of an Irish-Italian mother and a Jewish Catholic father, she tended to lean towards her father than her mother. She came into the literary scene with the publication of her first novel *Final Payments* in 1978. Hence many read her works not just on the basis of her large collection of work but on a larger context where she still continues to portray the contemporary American society. The feminine accent is seen in all her works. A reading of her works will show how she cares for women. Hence her novels are purely exploration of women's struggle to get a status in the society. In a nut shell, she is more than just a Catholic writer. *The Other Side*, as the name indicates, is the name by which the Irish immigrants referred to the promised land across the Atlantic. It is the only novel of Gordon set entirely on the immigrant experiences of the Irish. It is a narrative in 5 parts where the action takes place within a limited time frame of one day – August 14, 1985. Though the actions mentioned pertain to one particular day, Gordon vividly uses a series of flashbacks to highlight the plight of these people telling the story of all the incidents in each one's lives leading up to this particular day. People of five generations of the same family have gathered together to bid good bye to the matriarch of the family, Ellen. The story knits together scrappy incidents from the lives of the number of characters who have gathered there. Yet the story centers on Ellen, married to Vincent for sixty long years. She relives her

life in Ireland though she works and becomes and political activist for liberal causes. Her behaviour towards her children and grand children are not worth to be spoken of since they have none of the virtues gained from Ellen. The novel is a good example of a dysfunctional family in America – all because of a woman who headed the family. The novel is about the contributions of the immigrants, the Irish Americans to the American life and society. While the novel talks about the family structure and concentrates on the theme of love and its failure also, Gordon portrays the economic and social conditions too. The novel talks about certain typical traits of the Irish. Irish are generally termed Catholic. So the characters in the novel are basically Catholic but the intensity and religiosity is highly questionable. While Vincent, the patriarch is a church goer, Ellen is described as person who has none of the saving graces of a true Christian. Gordon portrays the Irish Catholic church to be puritanical in nature. It is also resistant to social and economic change. Ellen comments about the Irish saying: “What could you expect of them, a rosary in one hand, a pistol in the other, a flask of poteen in the pocket just in case their other remedies should fail them”. By thinking of the past events, Ellen condemns the church. Her experiences of her life in Ireland have made her to hate the Church and put all the blame on it. She blames Ireland for all the problems and sufferings that she underwent. Ellen's character is counterbalanced with the character of Vincent. Theresa, an unloved daughter of Ellen is a Catholic fanatic and a charismatic lady whose is deeply engrossed in evangelism. She is portrayed as an unloving woman with a cold nature. Her excess religious devotion and services have damaged the lives of her children. Therese is the outcome of Ellen's indifference as a mother. She is a medical secretary, who poisons everyone around her with her anger, wrath and jealousy. As a charismatic Catholic, she is said that she talks to the Holy Ghost. In spite of having the power to heal and do miracles, she purposely withholds it from her mother. That no priest was called to Ellen's bed side while she was dying is a point to be noted. “Constant words fill the air around her bed ... What kind of life would have brought up these words? She lived a hard life, but not the kind to know these words” is the description used by Gordon on how Ellen lies dying with no one to spiritually or morally support her.

The characters cling to the church for various reasons but they do neither live up to the expectation of the church nor to their own satisfaction on the basis of the doctrines have they heard. Dan and Sharon are alienated from the church because of their non conformity to the teaching of the Church on extramarital sex. Gordon ironically states that the Catholic belief has become just a tradition set by the forefathers than a set of moral code of conduct and beliefs. While considering the family life of the Irish Americans in the novel, Vincent and Ellen fail as parents. Ellen does not show any love and affection to her daughters. She shows her love to her son John. She is an embodiment of anger and rage. The same anger is shown towards the church and towards a stranger. She humiliated the

daughters and abandoned them later. She is tender hearted to her grandson Dan. While Vincent had been a soul force in her life, at the end of her life she is afraid if he might leave her. Though Vincent loves his children and especially his grandchildren, and tries to be a knitting force in his family, as a father his role becomes a zero. Gordon's mothers are always special in the other way. Here is a mother who has not mothered her children. Ellen witnessing her mother's evidence of miscarriages, series of stillbirths, insanity and her father putting away her mother in a country house in the care of another woman has affected her deeply. The consequence of this is the behaviour of Ellen and the conflicts that she faces down the generations. Her motherhood had been poisoned by the fate of her own mother. Camille, the granddaughter nurtured by Ellen has become very successful as a lawyer in divorce, and devotes herself to women clients. Magdalene, Camille's mother is an alcoholic. In *Reading Irish-American Fiction: the Hyphenated Self*, Margaret Hallissy points out that:

In *The Other Side* Ellen MacNamara's flight from the fate of her own mother in Ireland becomes one element of the dominant personality that she herself becomes as a mother. Mothering, failures of mothering, loss of a mother, the inability to become a mother: all are key issues in these novels; and all are rendered more complex by the fact that a mother or grandmother is from another country (22)

These lines are true of Ellen and they are a true depiction of the entire set of characters portrayed in the novel. Ellen has influenced her family more than Vincent – in a negative way. After the Irish landed on 'the other side', as they called the American continent, they took up various jobs for their survival. Once they the other side, they had a different dimension of the acquired place and aspired to a social status which was only a closed door once to them. The novel depicts the survival skills of these immigrants that have enabled them to flourish in their present home country. Vincent points out that the immigrants did the work of building up the nation. He whole heartedly accepts the first job he is offered i.e., digging the New York City subway system, though he was trained as an ironworker in Ireland. He later moves to work as a signal repairman and machinist. He is also actively involved in union organization. By the beginning of the century many people moved into better skilled jobs with a good pay. Further, Irish Americans were in great demand for jobs requiring verbal proficiency- teaching and law. In *The Other Side* Jack, the lawyer takes Daniel as his partner and joins his cousin Cam. They make their way up with their ability of their speaking skills. From their generation onwards, we have Irish Americans coming up in all the fields of their choice in an alien country. On the other hand, women took up petty jobs to make up their living. Some took jobs as domestic servants, while others took up stitching and knitting. In this novel, Ellen took a degrading job as a maid, and then worked as a seamstress in a garment industry. Women have also climbed the social ladder as the men did. Magdalene, Ellen's daughter owns a beauty salon; Marilyn, Theresa's daughter becomes a nurse and Sheilah is a social worker

devoted to Irish heritage. Camille; who inherited Ellen's strength and vigour becomes a lawyer. These professions were once only for the Americans and not for the immigrants. These professions requires the higher education available to women only if they joined religious orders and not otherwise. Priests and nuns form a part of Gordon's novels. *The Other Side* also follows the same pattern. It was a notion among the Irish American Catholics that the priesthood provided social status and security. It was a respectable position for the priest and his family. While there are various types of priests as there are various types of Irish Catholics, their views and expectations also differ from one another. One example is of Sheilah's husband Steve who leaves the priesthood to marry. The visit of the priest to the house of the MacNamaras is a different one. He is a staple of modern Irish fiction. He acts as an instrument of social control. Ellen scorns the ideas of the priest towards the labour union and also expels him from her house. She has fully rejected the church that a priest is not called to her death bed. There are nuns too in her novel. Sheilah left her vocation as a nun to marry a priest she had met at a civil rights sit in. On the other side, we see Sister Otile, who runs an innovative nursing home where Vincent recovers from his injury. She is more of a social worker than a religious person. These are the kinds of religious people that Gordon openly focuses in her novel. Irish Catholics are good for their excessive drinking. Men drinking in the public were considered a social status. For Irish American men, it was typical of Irish identity. Though Magdalene has been detected with breast cancer and waiting to die, she rarely leaves her room and spends the day drinking sherry and trying on clothes. The fragmented lives of the characters have to be taken into consideration. Wendy Smith in "Mary Gordon's Fine New Generation Novel" chronicles the disintegration of the characters as follows:

...The MacNamaras' two daughters, each scarred in her own way by the knowledge that their mother loved only their brother John (killed in World War II), are unhappy women: Magdalene an alcoholic who has rarely left her room in 15 years; Theresa a loveless woman whose primary gift is for finding fault. Theresa's children are as bruised as she: anxious Sheilah, who can never please anyone; Marilyn, about to get her third divorce; and rootless, drifting John, a classic burned-out '60, case. Only Magdalene's daughter Camille and John's son Dan, who share a law practice, appear to have drawn purpose and fulfillment from their grandparent's strength, though both bear emotional wounds inflicted by their estrangement from their mothers... (High beam)

The novel is entangled in a host of relationships that follow one generation after the other. The portrayal of Ellen in this old age is too heavy a cross to be carried by her. The above mentioned lines stand testimony to the fact that the unfulfilled need for love in these women and the power of human beings to damage and vie at each other is because they are incapable of love. Ellen rails against the past while Vincent did not allow hatred to poison his life. While he accepted the new environment, he did not forget or reject the old place. The concern of the novel transcends those of the Irish American family. The experiences of

several generations of MacNamara's stand an illustration to this. A family cannot escape the ties that bind it. In one way or the other every person is tied to his/her family and no one can escape as we see through the characters in the novel.

In a controversial 1988 article published in 'The New York Times Book Review', Gordon accounts for what she saw as a shortage of Irish American novelists that made her to write this novel. All the ideas in the novel are relevant to the ongoing debate about the contribution of the immigrant families to American life. The novel is not about the Irish American life in general only; it also focuses on the love and the failure of love and to love the characters. Gordon shatters the romantic mythology of the Irish American experience, and with it the nostalgic belief that the solution to today's problems lies in the return to the benign past. The immigrant experience is universal in nature. What demarcates Gordon's characters from the other immigrants is that the characters are Irish American and their story reflects the specifics of this history. The Irish who left Ireland were forcefully sent due to famine and their non-acceptance immediately in an alien land is a matter of concern. Yet they cherished their memories and had a firm stand across the shores and their voices have been heard in that they have established their credibility even in an alien land.

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