

Chapter-II

Sivakami As A Dalit Woman Novelist

CHAPTER II

SIVAKAMI AS A DALIT WOMAN NOVELIST

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.

-Robert Kegan

Man is a bundle of contradictions. When 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. Sivakami who had been one of the senior most administrative officers in the state of Tamil Nadu, is a resident of 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 which led to social issues becoming Sivakami's primary concern and avocation. Through her work she motivated the parents living in small villages to provide education to their children.

Sivakami started writing when she was a student and she willingly joined the essay competitions in school and the teachers encouraged her to write for the Christian magazine, which had a very local circulation. She grew up in a small town called

Parambalur. 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 a lot of 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? Somehow this triggered lots of questions about what literature is, what she was writing about and so on. Instead of inspiring her that arrested her spontaneous writing. Though Sivakami continued to write, she did not publish. And she concentrated on academics; she got a gold medal in her MA History. Then she wrote her IAS exams. After that she says in the 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".

Sivakami could not find a publisher for the first collection. Her friend came forward to publish it 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 under 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 can, without revealing her identity. The first publisher she approached said that the language of her book was very colloquial, not up to literary

standards and they refused to publish it. Subsequently her friend took it to Madurai where his friend ran a publishing house. After two years, when it was finally published, it hit the roof. Many people read it and discussed it. 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. The main preoccupation of these magazines which have limited circulation is to deconstruct existing institutions, including literature. Though it is the only 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), that are located 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 perspective, often

capturing mindscapes and dreams. Her writings in the Journal *Pudiya Kodangi* are much different from her novels (serialized). Her works deal with politics, culture, feminist theory, Dalit identity, gender-class-caste intersections that are the results of her experiences at workshops, training organized for Dalits, tribals and other marginalized communities.

Sivakami as a Dalit woman writer brought into focus, the gendered relations among castes - upper castes and Dalits. As an IAS officer she has been doing extensive work among tribal communities and backward classes. Apart from her early novels and her first collection of short stories, Sivakami has written substantially on caste and gender related issues with deep insight on class position of the characters represented. Though she has taken an unambiguous feminist stand, her approach to feminism is tempered with self-reflexiveness and a critical awareness of the caste question in the Indian social context. She foregrounds the caste question within the matrix of the feminist discourse in India. She has brought out clearly the gender and class paradigms impinging on caste relations, thus, underscoring the need to develop a comprehensive social culture. Some of the stories in her first collection of short stories, *Naalum Thodarum* reveal Sivakami's firm grasp of gender and caste interface within specific class structures. Sivakami depicts how sons grow up more privileged than daughters, and how mothers have internalized patriarchal code and hence valorize sons, considering them their future protectors over their daughters.

Sivakami depicts how Dalits have to address their problems on their own (just as a baby who cries out for milk gets attended fast), as well as how the state administration can be made more sensitive towards poor, deprived people when women are allowed to head posts of responsibility and power. In other words, the faceless, repressive state can function more efficiently when it is gender sensitized, especially in the sector of human

resources. Sivakami represents not only the subjugation of Dalits but also points out how they are capable of transgressing and thereby creating conditions for their deliverance as well. Sivakami delineates a dynamic traffic between gender and caste in an agrarian, rural context in Tamil Nadu. She also lays substantial emphasis on ideological, collective, organized form of action to overcome patriarchal and caste barriers. Sivakami's intervention in Dalit fiction and criticism lies in her interrogation of Dalit premise, her refusal to study Dalit related issues in an exclusivist stand, but instead place them in a multi-layered social context fissured by class and gender concerns. She interrogates the validity of studying Dalit life in isolation on the basis of the strength of her own position as an insider. This lends a credibility of vision to her writing. Although she ruthlessly exposes the weaknesses of Dalit movement, she also paves the way for strengthening it from within.

Sivakami quitted 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 2009s which according to her is, "Based on the principles of Dalit educationist and political leader Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar; it is a forum for social equality". In an exclusive interview to the Gulf News when she was asked about quitting the Administrative service and joining politics in 2008 Sivakami replied;

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.

As a Dalit Woman IAS officer, Sivakami's background of writing experience makes her the ideal person to have written these books. She 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. In her works she mentions 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. 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)

Like the shadow that follows one, caste is an appendage that will follow one wherever he goes. Sivakami has published five novels and four short story collections and is a regular contributor to the literary Magazine *Puthiya Kodangi*. Sivakami is one of the pioneers of Dalit writing in Tamil, who has written the first Dalit Tamil novel *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum* in 1989, which has been translated as *The Grip of Change* (2006). 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.

The Grip of Change is an engaging, immensely readable novel in English that successfully foregrounds issues of Dalit identity, caste- gender discourse in contemporary Tamil society. It is a milestone in translation texts because a dalit author chooses to reach out a wider readership without relying upon an intermediary. Sivakami's translation of her Tamil novel into English signals an important aspect of Dalit woman writer's empowerment that makes available, a wider readership to her on her own terms thereby minimizing translation-transmission politics that has crept into the domain of translation of marginalized voices into a language of power.

The novel *The Grip of Change* has two books: Book one is entitled Kathamuthu; *The Grip of Change* and book two is entitled as Gowri in 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 *Anandhayee* (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 the author 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 *Kurukkuvettu* into five languages. Another novel she wrote in Tamil was *Unmaikku Munnum Pinnam* (2012),

An IAS officer, writer and an activist, Sivakami in her fiction gives primacy to the interventionist perspective. Her short stories and novels foreground the dual oppression of Dalit women on grounds of caste and gender. Being a woman that too a Dalit novelist, she is able to throw more light on the twofold oppression or double marginalization of the Dalit women on the basis of caste and gender. She also accentuates Dalit leadership and the need for the unification of Dalit as a single group to fight their greatest threat, the upper caste Hindus. Often, the central protagonist is an educated Dalit young woman who struggles to realize a just social order and alert the women of her community to their rights. Gowri, in *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum*, is one such protagonist. In this novel, Sivakami focuses her attention on Dalit leadership and the need for consolidation of dalit groups to achieve a better bargain in the society. This novel, like Sivakami's subsequent novels, highlights, domestic violence on Dalit women, the patriarchal silencing of wives and daughters, the sexual repression of Dalit women even while celebrating women bonding

within and outside the family. Sivakami's fiction fuses Dalit discourse with feminist discourse.

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. For some sort of 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. But Kathamuthu is also a patriarch who seeks to completely control the women in his life. There are three of them: his two wives, Kanagavalli and Nagamani, and his almost grown daughter Gowri. With Thangam coming to him for help and refuge, she 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 fasten 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. Chinna Rao Yagati in his book *Dalits’ Struggle For Identity* says “perhaps the most potential benefit of education was the consciousness generated among the Dalits, who then could construct an identity of their own”(223-24). Gowri, indeed has created 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 the 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 as the best and forward thinking novels.

Periyannan, in the novel *The Taming of Women* is also a representative of a dominant class like Kathamuthu. Kathamuthu and Periyannan are depicted and acknowledged as people with 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 does the same to his wife Anandhayi and his concubine Lakshmi 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.

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. The novel concludes with Gowri's article wherein she foregrounds the need for evolving a “strong

movement that would join hands with backward, oppressed and poor castes”(193). Sivakami’s fiction foregrounds gender oppression of Dalit women within domestic space. In her fiction, women attain dignity only when they transgress social stereotypes and enter the public domain as Sivakami herself has done. In the process, women in Sivakami’s fiction are able to attain only limited success, partially fulfilled aspirations. However, they are happy with such a realization of selfhood. While recognizing the fractured identity of women, Sivakami nonetheless, celebrates their indomitable will to struggle, their courage to defy and transgress and their capacity to affirm an evolved identity rather than put up with a culturally allotted one. From the perspective of a patriarchal society, Sivakami’s women characters are struck with a fractured social identity.

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.

In the novel *The Grip of Change* there are many characters, single mothers, concubines, deserted wives or co-wives. The women themselves are happy to have evolved a distinct but socially transgressive identity. Poongavanam who is deserted by her lover, chooses to remain a single, unwed mother and refuses to yield to any pressure. Malar and Vadakathiyal valorize their widowhood and celebrate freedom from sexual assault that they were subjected to in the hands of male members of the family they were married to. Gowri rejects marriage as she considers that to be a patriarchal institution that subjugates and even celebrates subjugation of women. Lakshmi or Nagamani, when

forced to become a married man's concubine develop a positive link with the first wife and her children. They evolve as an alternative family that defies in a brilliant stroke the patriarchal definition of a family. Instead of the father or husband heading a family that consists of his wife and their children, Lakshmi and Nagamani or Thangam form by themselves a close knit family with no male head. Lakshmi is lovingly referred to as younger mother by Arul and Anbu while Nagamani and Thangam dote upon Gowri. Thus while society places and exploits them as concubines, the women are able to subvert societal restrictions, male violence and share the joys of motherhood and female bonding.

Sivakami occupies a rather unique position in the canon of Dalit fiction in Tamil. She is a respected writer among the first generation of Dalit writers in Tamil who began writing in the late eighties. Sivakami as a woman Dalit writer, brought into focus, for the first time, the gendered relations among castes _ upper castes and Dalits as well as among Dalits themselves in Tamil Nadu. Sivakami's career graph brings to focus the possibilities thrown open to Dalits through the constitutional mechanism of positive discrimination. The poor Dalits hardly gain anything substantial. For a meager increase in their wages of 50 paise, the landlords would force them to work for an hour longer, thereby nullifying even the marginal gain. Kathamuthu bullies the Odaiyar to settle for a private panchayat over Thangam's case. He blackmails the landlord to offer a residence for Thangam at his mansion. When he is outraged by the suggestion, Kathamuthu immediately suggests a monetary compensation. "Give her ten or twenty thousand and wash your hands off her," he argues (121) .The Odaiyar hands over a ten thousand and disappears from the scene. Thangam, is over whelmed by Kathamuthu's help and hands over the money to his wife for safe keeping. Though he asks her for a loan he plans to keep the entire booty to himself.

When Thangam wishes to get her share of her husband's ancestral land, Kathamuthu manages to get the matter settled in Thangam's favour through courts. Once the matter is settled, the land promptly gets transferred to his name. He buys sarees, gets lavish food cooked at home, insults Kanagavalli and Nagamani and praises Thangam who feels extremely obliged to him. But of course she is also forced to remain dependent on him. (131-140) Unable to return to her hamlet, as she holds herself guilty of the caste disturbances at her cheri, resulting in burning up of huts, she also has handed over the compensation money and the land to Kathamuthu. Hence, she has no other way but to stay put at Kathamuthu's house and be his concubine. On a Sunday, Kathmuthu serves liquor and meat to his family, locks up the women (wives and daughter) while they catch up an afternoon nap and rapes Thangam while she is in a drunken stupor. Thangam pleads incoherently, "You're like an elder brother to me" but Kathamuthu has his way with her. While Nagamani resents Thangam, their skirmishes are settled by Kathamuthu who supports Thangam punching Nagamani. Kanagavalli tries to maintain peace between the two. Thangam works at Kathamuthu's fields and supervises the farmhands. Thangam does exactly what she has been doing at Odaiyar's farm following his assault upon her. The only difference between Kathamuthu and the Odaiyar was that when Kathamuthu keeps her at his house, the Odaiyar kept his liaison a secret. Kathamuthu is, in fact, shrewder than the Odaiyar. While he pretends to the villagers that he has given Thangam (a childless, poor widow) a home, in reality he usurps her land and money. Thus, both the uppercaste community and Kathamuthu take the Dalit villagers and Thangam for a ride, exploit them in the name of patronage and justice and fill up their personal coffers. The sexual and violent physical assault upon Thangam, her cry for justice are forgotten or cleverly managed to suit the privileged from both the groups.

Lakshmi in the novel *The Taming of Women* reaffirms the image of a destitute woman ending up as a concubine. Like Nagamani and Thangam, she too is a childless widow. Her youth is exploited by numerous men and the last one abandons her at a lodge. Her sexual exploitation results in a damaged uterus and she is unable to conceive or retain a pregnancy. Periyannan is introduced to her as a rich childless widower though he has, in fact, a wife and six children. He is enticed by her beauty and sets her up in a house in the town away from his family and home. He pampers her with clothes, jewel and holidays at hill stations. Lakshmi who is born in a Thevar family is the favoured and only daughter surrounded by brothers and doting parents. Her post-widowhood lifestyle alienates her from her family and she fears a violent reprisal if she ever returns home. She is happy to live with Periyannan. When his young son dies at home and he finds it difficult to sustain two households and manage his work (procuring contracts to build bridges and roads), he persuades Lakshmi to move into his family home. He reassures Lakshmi that his wife is a harmless woman who has remained submissive to him and therefore Lakshmi need not fear her rival: 'I am unable to keep both of you happy. This bridge will be done in a year. I want to get Kala married by then. Mani will move to the city to continue his studies. The rest are still little. You stay on the first floor with me. Anandhayi is a patient woman. She got married to me at a very young girl. She is scared of me and will not even squeak.'(99).

Men deny freedom - social, economic and sexual not only to their wives, but also to their daughters. Their restrictive treatment of their wives is extended to the next generation of women within their home also. Thus development or social progress in the arena of gender remains static and women whether they are adolescent or middle aged experience a similar violent, volatile mode of treatment at the hands of their fathers, brothers and sons. If there are any violations of family code by daughters the mothers/

wives get the brunt of it. By the end of the novel, Periyannan successfully isolates Aanandayi in her ageing years. The married daughters are not encouraged to visit their home or converse with their mother while the sons are kept tightly under a leash by him. He threatens then saying that they would not get any share in the property, if they raise a whisper. When Periyannan was singing to his grandchild hinting to Anandhayi that not a single child she bore him was worthy, “Mani, who was eating inside, said to Anandhayi, ‘Only one queen? Tell him there were ninety-one queens. If the king was worthless, how can he expect his children to be anything of worth?’ ”(227). Even though all the children knew the father’s worth, they could not do anything against him.

Thus, all the children are controlled, treated harshly by the father and are moulded by him in such a manner that they perceive their mother as someone who deserves the violence she receives from her husband; the mother-daughter bond is submitted to such an extent that the daughters brought up on the staple diet of violence, grow up to be violent towards their mother - abusive and bereft of empathy. Although abused by their father, they are in awe of his authority and power. As economic power and social prestige rest with their father and their mother is reduced to a domestic drudge and a child-bearer, the daughters fear the former while feeling ashamed of the latter. Such a perception of patriarchal authority and its victims is reversed in *The Grip of Change* where Kathamuthu’s daughter shows a positive affinity towards her father’s co-wives and rebels against her father. She, in fact, undertakes an earnest attempt to educate and liberate her mother and Nagamani and help them emerge out of Kathamuthu’s subjugation. Gowri questions her father's authority and chooses an alternative political ideology, offering him a challenge in his political arena as well.

The difference in the attitude of Gowri and Aanandayi’s daughters lies in the quality of education, social exposure and political training received by Gowri which

Kala, Danam and Arul were deprived of. While Gowri, backed by her ideological conviction uses speech to interrogate and subvert her father's authority and his abuse of power, Danam, a school drop-out uses it only as an emotional outburst, to vent her frustrations or wound fellow victims of her father's authority. Though Sivakami holds out Gowri as a positive ideal, she does not denounce Danam or her sisters. She shows how their upbringing and treatment of their mothers have moulded their conduct within the framework of violence and abuse. As they are brought up as victims of a patriarchal society and did not have the good fortune of the right of education to enable their perspective to discriminate, challenge or observe male power as oppressive to women at large. Deprived of education, a comfortable home and conjugal happiness, these daughters of Aanandayi are too self-absorbed and frustrated to help or show empathy to other women, whereas Gowri is able to make a political choice. She refuses marriage and makes ideological intervention through writing and through praxis. Thus she challenges and violates the patriarchal code concerning women's role within the family while Aanandayi's daughters have been so violated upon that they too adopt violence in their inter-personal relationships. Compared to her daughters Aanandhayi is a more empowered woman.

Aanandhayi's old mother-in-law valorizes work over conjugal life that is restrictive and exploitative. She advises Aanandhayi to work in the fields, manage her cattle and enjoy her children's company rather than complain about her husband's philandering ways. Grandmother herself, although half blind and lame, sits on the footpath, sells vegetables or rears goats and earns a handsome profit. Aanandhayi shows enabling possibilities for post-menopausal women when she flings the coin at her heckling husband's face and asserts her dignity. Dalit women of all age groups, of

different class backgrounds defy patriarchal stereotypes and evolve a distinct, personally fulfilling identity.

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, restrictive social identity. Hence, she advocates simultaneous, relentless, social confrontation of both caste and gender injustice.

Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* expresses the faith the author has in herself and that is reflected in the creation of the character Gowri. In the life of Dalits, like food, the fortitude to fight, the unity to stand up, the courage to withstand, the education to enrich, the leadership to light, the faith to face the failure and the hope to hold on to life are inevitable. The Dalits have to seek their identity in order to liberate themselves from the clutches of caste discrimination. The writer Bama gives a clarion call to her community to wakeup to bring about the change in her novel *Karukku*;

We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission,

and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal.(28)

To breathe the pure air of freedom and to get recognition the Dalits have to learn even the unwritten pages of the text, have to tell the untold tale of unfulfilled dreams, have to travel on the road that is less travelled along with the heart that dares to live and die as Dalit. Trilok Sharma, in his book *Dalit Women: Issue and Perspectives* traces as the transformations that has come over the lives of Dalit women and points out that the Dalit women will overcome their problems and will hold their head high.

As the poorest of the poor, Dalit women lack the means and the opportunity to defend themselves at home or to make their problems known outside of rural India. Many Dalit women have formed NGO's through which they collectively fight against abuse from the upper classes. Such Dalit women abandon tears and embrace the shield of confidence in the hope of equality. The courage, struggle, and persistence of today's Dalit women against suppression, exploitation and torture has [have] the power to ensure that the future generations will not have to face the bleak reality Dalits have faced for the past and two thousand years.(36)