

## **DALIT POLITICS IN SIVAKAMI'S NOVEL *THE GRIP OF CHANGE***

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### **Abstract**

Dalitpolitics is a very complicated one. It involves the establishment of various levels of identities. Presently the political forms demand newtypes of writing, which is achieved through Dalit literature. Dalit fiction addresses the issues encountered by the Dalits in society. The paper discusses the Dalit politics focussed in the novel *The Grip of Change*. The analysis is based on the Dalit political system that exists under patriarchy and how the Dalit leaders abuse their power. The major characters in the novel are Kathamuthu, Paranjothi Udaiyar, Gowri and Chandran who involve in politics.

**Keywords:** Dalit Politics, Caste, Slavery and Subjugation.

P. Sivagami, born in 1957, is an acclaimed Tamil writer. She has written four novels and are centered on Dalit and feminist themes. *The Grip of Change* was translated in to English from Tamil in 2009 by the author herself. She is one of the earliest Tamil Dalit writers to draw attention to the dual oppression of Dalit women at the hands of upper caste men and Dalit men. She was initially an IAS officer, but she gave up her job to become a full - time writer in 2008. Her maiden novel, *The Grip of Change* is about the Patriarchal system that exists in the Dalit society. Dalit patriarchy is the central theme dealt with in Tamil Dalit literature.

Politics is a system to influence the public and to exercise positions of governance over a particular section in society. It is a practice of the distribution of power and resources within a community. Different strategies are involved in politics which develop one's own political subjects, enactment of laws, and exercising force including warfare against adversaries.

In the novel, the character Thangam is a lower caste widow who works in the field of the so-called landlord cum upper caste man namely, Paranjothi. He is attracted by her charm and he seduces her often. Thangam earns the enmity of Paranjothi's wife and her brothers due to the illicit relationship. When his illegal relationship comes into light, he feels ashamed and he thinks that how he can face the world with his name thus polluted. He is fully upset as his enemies will use his indiscretion to win votes in the next election. This shows that he is not much worried about the mistake he has committed knowingly. He does not bother neither the police nor the courts. Using his political influence and money, he attempts darely to suppress the case. Paranjothi Udayar tries to settle the case with the help of Kathamuthu, the Dalit political leader. Kathamuthu does not care about his own people. He is dishonest and corrupt. Finally, they reach a compromise due to the interference of Kathamuthu.

Policemen reach the Cheri to enquire about a fire accident, but the Cheri people hesitate to answer their questions. When Kathamuthu turns up, they charge against the upper caste people who belong to Udayar, Reddiar, and Padayachi communities in the village. But in all the Dalit issues, they join together to protect them and to hide their mistakes. The novelist writes:

The Moment Cheri caught fire, the rich Reddiars, Ramalingam and Arunachalam had joined forces with Paranjothi Udayar. In that village, the Reddiars and Udayars were equal in number and status. They maintained difference of opinion with regard

to village and political affairs, but joined hands over labour and wage issues. These two dominant communities owed political allegiance to the ruling party, so the new rules of land reform could hardly be implemented. (*The Grip of Change* 63)

Kathamuthu is the President of the village. He has done some services to his men. He has fulfilled some basic needs of the Cheri people. The Cheri people respect him but he exploits his own people for retaining his position. The Collector, the Tahsildar, the Dalit leader Kathamuthu, the upper caste landlord Paranjothi Udaiyar and the village elders assemble for discussion related to the burnt houses. The committee decides to provide some money to the victims. After the discussion Paranjothi asks Kathamuthu to discuss Thangam's case. Kathamuthu does not have time to discuss this issue. Instead, he lists his busy schedule thus:

Hurry? How can you ask that? It's already two in the morning tomorrow I have to go to Trichy to meet the Adi-dravidar welfare officer. The Ambedkar Association is organizing a procession to the police station. They're demonstrating against police in action in the case. I have to .( TGC 74 )

The Ambedkar Association is organizing a procession against the police to get justice in Thangam's case. But Kathamuthu assures to Paranjothi Udaiyar that he will settle the issue amicably between Paranjothi Udaiyar and Thangam. So, the procession is cancelled. Kathamuthu demands justice in Thangam's issue. He organizes a meeting with the Ambedkar Association representatives. In the meeting, Kathamuthu, the representatives of Ambedkar Association, the village elders, Paranjothi Udaiyar and his relatives participate. In the Panchayat, Kathamuthu plays a major role. The Ambedkar Association representatives become emotional. But Kathamuthu does not allow them to discuss the issue openly. Kathamuthu does not give proper respect to the Association

representatives and to the village elders. He independently assures Paranjothi to discuss the problem in the Panchayat. In the beginning, Kathamuthu strongly sticks on to his demand in the Panchayat but Udaiyar is not ready to accept his demands. Kathamuthu does not solicit the opinion of the village elders, or the victim Thangam. Finally, the Panchayat decides that Paranjothi should pay ten thousand rupees to Thangam as a compensation. The village youth are not satisfied. Kathamuthu sells his own people's wish and their freedom of expression for his political gains. The Dalit people put trust in him. But he cheats his own people. Kathamuthu and Paranjothi join hands with each other and act against the victim namely, Thangam.

A conflict arises between Kathamuthu and his brother Kalimuthu over a boundary line. They divide their agricultural land and their house. The issue was also taken to the Panchayat. As per the instructions given by the Panchayat, Kalimuthu and his son Chandran shift to a rented house to stay separately. After this problem, Chandran joins in a rice mill. He narrates to his co-workers the injustice done to him by Kathamuthu. Chandran, the youngest among them becomes an active Union leader. He is selected as a new leader of the Union. Like all new leaders, he too wants to overhaul the system. Chandran leads the Union smoothly. He earns a good name among the Union members and in the public. But Kathamuthu does not like Chandran's robust growth and popularity. He considers Chandran a competitor to him. Because he has a reputation among his community men. It reflects his avarice and jealous nature.

When Kalimuthu dies, Chandran feels lonely. Kathamuthu comes forward to look after the formalities. But his well-wishers warn Chandran :

Keep your distance from Kathamuthu. he's like a scorpion. You never know when you'll be bitten. On the other hand, some other advised, "Kathamuthu talks a lot

of rubbish, but he is good at heart .you can always go to him for anything you need”  
(111)

Chandran keeps a distance from Kathamuthu. Kathamuthu does not like Chandran’s growth and the development of the society. After his father’s death, Chandran involves himself in the Union activities. Finally, many Dalit associations voice for Dalit freedom. But some Dalit organizations favour the ruling party and they do not at all consider the welfare of their own people. The author criticises such leaders through the portrayal of Kathamuthu, who belongs to such a category of the Dalit leaders. Sivakami deals with the dilution of the values of the Dalit community. Like the British colonisers who framed policies for their own selfish purposes, the Dalit leaders also develop the tendencies of the coloniser. Kathamuthu sacrifices the ideals of the Dalit associations and supports the upper caste men in order to achieve his own ends. This illustrates the fact that the subaltern who attains a position also misuses the power by mingling with the people who belongs to dominant castes. Power corrupts even a Dalit leader. A Dalit leader allows his ideology to go overboard, when he assimilates the politics of an unscrupulous commanding sections in society.

**Primary Source:**

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