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The Inner Grip of Patriarchy: Internalised Oppression and Resistance among Dalit Women in P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the idea of patriarchy and self-policing among Dalit women in P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*. The paper is not about how men have power over women, but also about how women follow the rules that society makes for them, and they do this without even thinking about it. *The Grip of Change* shows this through the character of Thangam and other women in the story. We see how things like caste and tradition, and patriarchal values become a part of the life of Dalit women and how these things affect the way Dalit women think. Dalit women like Thangam are influenced by these things. They start to police themselves, which means they start to follow the rules that restrict their freedom. The thing is, women are not just oppressed by the world around them and by men. They also have this oppression inside their minds. If we look at things from a Dalit point of view and really examine the text, we can see how this happens. It shows us that the way society is set up works with the thoughts and feelings that women have about themselves to keep things unfair. The paper says that Dalit women have to fight for the freedom to make their choices in two ways: against the world outside and against the thoughts and beliefs they have inside. Dalit women will not really be free until they question these thoughts and beliefs, they have inside.

Keywords: Internalised Patriarchy, Dalit Women, Self-Policing, Dalit Feminism, Agency, P. Sivakami

INTRODUCTION

This intersection of caste and gender can also be understood through Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality *(*Crenshaw 1245*).* Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* is an important book in Dalit feminist literature. This book shows us the relationship between caste, gender and power in Dalit communities. *The Grip of Change* is often seen as a story about men being in charge and caste being oppressive. In this story, Dalit women are shown as people who are suffering because of men having power over them. Because of the social hierarchy. *The Grip of Change* also helps us understand things that are not so easy to see. It helps us see that there is more to the story than just what's visible. *The Grip of Change* gives us an understanding of Dalit feminist literature and the issues that Dalit women face. This shows how the system of patriarchy

and the traditions of caste do not just affect women from the outside but they also slowly become a part of the way Dalit women think and behave. The patriarchy and caste traditions really get inside the minds of women and change the way they do things. Dalit feminism shows us that being a caste woman is a really tough experience. As Gopal Guru argues, "Dalit women talk differently" because their experience of oppression is shaped simultaneously by caste and gender *(*Guru 2549*)*. It is different from what upper caste women go. The book in, *The Grip of Change,* has women like Thangam who face problems because of men but because of what they think about themselves. They think this way because of the rules they have been living with for a long time. These rules are made by society. They favour men, so women start doing what society thinks is okay for them to do. Dalit feminism is about how caste and gender make life very hard for women, like Thangam.

This paper focuses on this internal dimension of oppression. It studies how Dalit women start to police themselves and unknowingly sustain the system that limits their freedom. By closely examining the novel from this perspective, the paper attempts to show that true liberation for Dalit women requires questioning both external authority and internalised beliefs.

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVE

The book *The Grip of Change* by P. Sivakami is usually talked about in terms of how bad the caste system's how men are in charge. People also focus on the lives of Dalit women. These are things to think about, as they often miss something that is not so obvious. How the ideas of patriarchal society and caste rules get stuck in the heads of Dalit women. We need to look into this part of the book that people usually do not think about. This paper is about exploring this part of *The Grip of Change* by P. Sivakami that has been overlooked. *The Grip of Change*, by P. Sivakami, has a lot to say about Dalit women.

How they are treated. The reason for this study is to look at how women are controlled from the inside, not just from the outside. The book shows that women are not just controlled by men. They also start to control themselves. Women begin to accept and follow the rules that limit their freedom. This is how women regulate their behaviour, which is a big part of how patriarchy works. Patriarchy is able to keep going without using force because of this self-regulation. The study of the novel is important to understand how patriarchy continues to affect women through control.

The objective of this paper is to analyse how characters like Thangam and other women in the novel reflect this internalised patriarchy. It aims to demonstrate that the struggle for Dalit women's liberation is not only social but also psychological, requiring resistance against both outer authority and inner conditioning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The book *The Grip of Change* is talked about a lot, especially when it comes to how it shows violence because of caste, discrimination against women and the fact that Dalit people are standing up for themselves. People who study this book like how Sivakami writes about the lives

of women and how she challenges the ideas of mainstream feminists, who often do not consider the realities of caste.

Many people who have studied *The Grip of Change* say that men in power take advantage of women, and the system of caste makes women more vulnerable. *The Grip of Change* is a book because it talks about *The Grip of Change* and its impact on Dalit women. The way *The Grip of Change* portrays caste violence and gender discrimination is a part of what makes *The Grip of Change* worth discussing. Dalit feminist critics say that the novel shows the lives of Dalit women have. They face problems from people in the caste and also from the men in their own community. Shailaja Paik terms this "double discrimination, " where Dalit women internalise obedience and silence as survival *(*Paik 67*).* This is a deal because Dalit women have to deal with two kinds of problems at the same time. These views point out the issues in the story like the fight for respect, fairness and the ability to make their own decisions. The novel is really about the struggle of women for dignity, justice and agency.

However, very few interpretations examine how oppression operates internally within the consciousness of Dalit women. The focus generally remains on visible acts of domination rather than on the psychological acceptance of patriarchal norms. This paper attempts to fill this gap by analysing how women in the novel unknowingly participate in maintaining the system through their thoughts, beliefs, and actions. By doing so, the study contributes a new perspective to Dalit feminist readings of Sivakami's work.

METHODOLOGY / RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is about P. Sivakami's book *The Grip of Change*. It takes a look at the story to see how Dalit women characters deal with the fact that they have been taught to believe in patriarchy and police their own behaviour. The research uses a Dalit feminist perspective to understand how being a Dalit and a woman affects the thoughts and actions of these characters. *The Grip of Change* is studied to see how caste and gender together shape the lives of women characters. The paper looks at how the characters in the story think about norms and the values that say men are more important than women. It does this by looking at what the women in the story say and do, and how they react to things. This helps us see how these social norms and patriarchal values become a part of who the women really are. The study is not about what happens to the women or how men treat them, but also about how the women think and feel about themselves. By doing this, the research shows us how the women are affected by these norms and patriarchal values both from the outside and from the inside, in the story of the women.

DISCUSSION

In *The Grip of Change,* P. Sivakami shows us a society where caste and patriarchy is a big part of daily life. When you first look at the novel, it seems like it is about men being in charge of women. When you read it more closely, you see that the control over Dalit women is not always obvious or forced. *The Grip of Change* is a novel that really makes you think. The control over women in *The Grip of Change* often happens in a subtle way; it gets inside the minds of the

women. The values of patriarchy and the traditions of caste become so normal that women start to follow them without thinking about why they do things that way or if it is fair. *The Grip of Change*, by P. Sivakami, is an example of this. Thangam is an important part of this story. She goes through a lot of things, and people treat her very poorly. The way she reacts to these things is based on what she has learned about things like honour and shame, and what she is supposed to do. The way Thangam acts shows that she really believes in what people expect from her as a Dalit woman.

Thangam does not always stand up for herself *"*What can I do? I have to bear all this quietly.*" (*Sivakami 37) because she has been taught to think about what society says is okay. Thangam's life is shaped by what people around her think a Dalit woman should be. The fact that a woman does not say anything does not mean she is weak. It just means that the idea of patriarchy has become a part of her life. She controls her actions based on what society thinks is right, which is like policing herself. Even when there are no men around to tell her what to do she still behaves in a way that fits what people in a society expect from her. This shows that the system of patriarchy does not need someone to constantly enforce the rules. It stays alive because people follow the rules on their own, which is what patriarchy is all about.

Role of Caste and Tradition in Shaping Women's Thinking

The caste system in a novel is not about who you are in society; it is also about how you think. "Anupama Rao explains that caste operates as a "structure of thought" shaping how individuals understand themselves" (Rao 112). Dalit women are taught from an age what they can and cannot do. There are rules about how they should talk, act and react to things that happen. These rules are closely connected to the ideas of men being in charge, which makes it hard for women to know what is because of their caste and what is because of being a woman. The caste system and the way women are treated are tied together. Dalit women have to deal with both the caste system and the fact that they are women. Thangam and other women learn that they should listen and not talk back. They are taught to be quiet and strong. These things are seen as good.

They actually stop women from speaking out against things that are not fair, so women start to think that it is normal to suffer. They think that dealing with times is what they are supposed to do instead of seeing it as something that is being done to them, like Thangam and other women are being treated unfairly. Thangam and other women need to realise that they do not have to put up with this. This internal acceptance shows how caste and patriarchy work together to shape the mindset of Dalit women. The control is not only physical but also psychological. The women become carriers of these traditions, passing them on to others and reinforcing the system unknowingly.

Women as Participants in Sustaining Patriarchy

One big part of the novel is how women help keep the ways of men being in charge. Women tell women what to do, they point out what is wrong, and they decide if other women are good or not based on what people think they should be. Women do this because they really believe this is

how things should be, not because they want to be mean to each other. The novel shows how women do these things to women without even realizing it because that is what they have learned from society. Women, like the women in the novel, play a role in keeping these old ways alive. Older women are like the ones who make sure the old ways are kept alive. *"*A woman must know how to behave; otherwise she brings disgrace to everyone*" (*Sivakami 63). They see to it that younger women do what they are supposed to do. This is how the system where men are, in charge keeps going even when men are not directly involved. The older women think they are helping to keep everything in order so they keep doing what they are doing and that is how the system keeps going on its own. Older women are the ones who really make this system work because they believe they are protecting the way things are supposed to be. The way Dalit women take part in things really shows how complicated it is to deal with oppression. Dalit women are affected by the system. They also help keep it going. What Dalit women prove is that they have really taken in the values that people have forced on them.

Absence of Direct Male Control and Presence of Mental Control

There are times in the novel when the men are not around, but the women still do what they think they are supposed to do. This happens because the women are following rules that they think are expected of them, even when no one is watching. The novel shows that the real power to control women's behaviour comes from inside their minds, from the way they think about what is expected of them as women. People are really scared of what others will think of them, they do not want to be embarrassed or feel ashamed. This is because of the way they were taught to think about things when they were growing up. Women are especially careful to follow the rules so they do not do anything, even when they have the chance to make their own choices and do what they want. Women police their own behaviour to avoid doing something that goes against the rules. The rules of society are what women follow to avoid social judgment and shame. This shows that the patriarchy has a strong hold on people's minds rather than their bodies. The patriarchy is still much in control of the way people think. This is where the patriarchy has its hold in people's thoughts and feelings not in physical strength.

Need for Mental Resistance for True Freedom

Sivakami's story tells us that it is not enough for Dalit women to just fight against the things that're outside of them. Dalit women need to do more than that. Even if the world around them changes for the better, the things they believe in, which they learned from years of being told what to do can still hold them back. Sivakami's narrative shows that Dalit women's liberation is not about external resistance; it is also about changing the way Dalit women think about themselves. To really be free, Dalit women need to think about the ideas of honour, duty and obedience that they have learned. They have to see how their thoughts have been influenced by the caste system and the way men are treated as important. When Dalit women understand this they can start making decisions that're what they really want not just what society thinks they should do. Dalit women should be able to make their choices based on what they want not just on what people expect from them. Thangam's experiences show that the struggle is not only

against men or society but also against the thoughts within her own mind.

Internal Conflict and the Burden of Respectability

The Grip of Change shows another side of patriarchy and that is the burden of respectability that Dalit women have to deal with. In *The Grip of Change* respectability means Dalit women have to be obedient, pure, quiet and strong. *The Grip of Change* makes Dalit women think that they are only worthy if they do what is expected of them. This idea is really clear in Thangam's story. Thangam's suffering is closely tied to the idea of respectability. "If people start talking about me, where will I hide my face?*" (*Sivakami 52). When bad things happen to Thangam she is not thinking about getting justice; she is thinking about what people will say and how it will shame her and her family. *The Grip* of Change shows how Dalit women, like Thangam are affected by the burden of respectability.

The way society is set up, it is really clear that men have a lot of power over women. This is shown in how people think about honour. Women are expected to act in ways so that they do not bring shame to their families. Thangam thinks about what other people will think of her when she does things. She feels really bad inside because she is stuck between being hurt and feeling like she has to be quiet about it. This shows that she has learned to think in a way that's not very fair to women. Thangam thinks that maybe she is the one who has done something instead of thinking that maybe the way things are is not right. She wonders if she has failed as a woman, rather than wondering why women, like her, have to suffer in the first place.

The weight of being respectable is like a trap that gets inside your mind. Women do not have to be made to do what they are told because they choose to follow the rules to keep their name. This way of controlling people is stronger than using force because it is something that women do to themselves. Women want to be seen as people, so they do what is expected of them, and that is what keeps them in line. The burden of respectability is what really holds women back.

Language, Silence, and Self-Expression

Sivakami uses language and silence to show how Dalit women police themselves. Dalit women often stay quiet when it really matters, not because they do not have anything to say. Because they think speaking up would be wrong or embarrassing. The Dalit women learn to be silent, over time. This silence is something that they get used to because of what they have been taught for many years. Sivakami shows this through the Dalit women in her work.

Thangam does not like to talk about what she is going through. *"*She lowered her head and remained silent though she wanted to speak*." (*Sivakami 41*)*. This shows that she is holding inside. She thinks carefully before she says anything because she is scared of what people will think. This is another way that women are held back by the ideas of society. Women start to control what they say so that they can fit in with what people expect from them. Thangam is an example of this. Women, like Thangam limit what they say and do so that they can meet the expectations of society. Silence in the novel is really not about emptiness. It is actually a sign that people are resisting something. They are not saying it out loud. The novel shows how women

are careful about what they say. They control their voices so that everything seems okay, and people do not get upset. This is how women help maintain order by being quiet when they need to be. Silence in the novel is a deal, it is, about women and their voices and how they use silence to keep things in order.

Psychological Conditioning from Childhood

The novel shows that this process starts when Dalit girls are young. Dalit girls see how the women around them act. They learn from that. They figure out what is okay and what is not okay from the things they do every day and from what people tell them. When Dalit girls become women, these things they learned become a part of who they are, as Dalit girls. Thangam does not make decisions. Her reactions are the result of things that have been happening to her for a time. She thinks that doing what she is told is good and not doing what she is told is bad. This is what she has learned. It helps the system of men being in charge stay in place from one generation to the next, even if nobody is forcing it to happen. Thangam and people like Thangam are affected by this system every day.

So people start to oppress others. It becomes a habit that is passed down. This does not happen because of the family they are born into. Because of the things they learn from the people around them. Oppression is something that people learn to do. Then they teach it to others, so it keeps going on and on. Oppression is a behaviour that is learned, not something that you are born with.

Contrast Between External Resistance and Internal Submission

There are times in the novel when you can see women standing up against things that're not fair. These moments do not last very long because the women are not sure of themselves. Women may get really mad. Feel frustrated, but they have a hard time doing something about it. The novel shows that women struggle with their thoughts and feelings, and this holds them back from taking action against injustice. The women, in the novel, feel angry or frustrated about injustice. Their own beliefs stop them from doing anything about it.

The difference here shows the point of this paper: Dalit women have to deal with two big problems. Dalit women have to fight against the system that's unfair because of their caste and because they are women but Dalit women also have to fight against the voice, inside them that says they should just do what they are told. Sivakami shows us that it is not easy to be free. She wants us to see that liberation is not about changing the way society works but also about changing the way we think. Sivakami makes it clear that we need to change our minds and the world, around us at the time. This is what Sivakami means by liberation.

The Cycle of Self-Policing Among Women

The novel shows something interesting about women. They keep an eye on what other women are doing. Older women tell women to be careful and not say too much. They tell them to do what has always been done. Women do this because they want to keep each other safe but it actually stops women from doing what they want. Women are always watching women in this

story.

This is how it works. The system of patriarchy does not need men to be, in charge all the time. Women themselves become the ones who make sure everyone follows the rules. They teach women the same things they were taught, like what to be afraid of and what they can and cannot do. This way, the system of patriarchy continues to exist. Women pass on the fears and limitations that they learned from the system of patriarchy so it keeps going. This kind of self-policing creates a community where women do not want to be different from the rest. Women themselves make sure that other women follow the rules and do not do anything out of the ordinary. This is not something that men are telling them to do.

Rather, it is the women who are keeping each other in line. The community is, like this because women are regulating their behaviour and the behaviour of other women, and this is what makes deviation from the norms something that women do not want to do.

Breaking the Internal Grip

The title, *The Grip of Change,* is also about the grip that people have. The change that Sivakami is talking about is not about society, but it is also about how people think. For Dalit women to really be free, they need to let go of *The Grip of Change* that they have inside them, which is the beliefs that they have learned. *The Grip of Change* is very strong. It affects Dalit women deeply. They must loosen *The Grip of Change* that they have inside them to experience freedom.

Thangam's journey is really tough. It shows how hard it is to change. She starts to see that she is suffering. It is hard for her to let go of the things she has been taught. Thangam's struggle with these values is the beginning of her standing up for herself, which is the first step towards mental resistance. Thangam's mental resistance is what will help her to be strong. Sivakami suggests that awareness is the beginning of liberation. When women start recognising how their thoughts are shaped by patriarchy, they can begin to challenge it.

FINDINGS

The book *The Grip of Change* shows that the system where men have power over women works in two ways. It is obvious when men are in charge and when there is a caste hierarchy. It also works in a quiet way inside the minds of Dalit women. The research looks at characters like Thangam. It finds that they often control their actions without realising it because of the traditional ideas they have about how they should behave.

This is a way that the system of oppression keeps going even when nobody is forcing it on them from the outside. *The Grip of Change* makes it clear that this is how patriarchy works, through the things that Dalit women, like Thangam, think and do every day. The things we found out show that caste and patriarchy are connected, and they affect the way Dalit women think from a young age. Dalit women learn to be obedient, quiet and patient. They also learn to be respectable. These are the things they think they should do naturally. Because of this, Dalit women often do not see that they are being treated unfairly; they think that their suffering is a part of what is

expected of them in their community. Dalit women see this as their role in society.

Women play a role in keeping these norms alive by telling other women what to do and correcting them. This reflects Rege's view that caste and patriarchy are reproduced through everyday practices of women themselves *(*Rege, "Dalit Women" WS44*)*. This means that women themselves help keep the system going from one generation to the next. The story shows that Dalit women's fight for freedom is not about fighting against people who are trying to control them from the outside but also about questioning the things they believe in that were taught to them by those people the Dalit women's struggle for freedom is really about changing the way Dalit women think about themselves and the world, around them and that is a big part of the Dalit women's fight for freedom.

These findings show that having resistance is really important for people to be truly free. Mental resistance is the key to liberation. It is what helps people become truly free, from things that hold them back.

CONCLUSION

P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* is a book that really makes you think about how caste and gender affect *The Grip of Change* Dalit communities. *The Grip of Change* is important because it shows how Dalit women start to believe in the ideas that *The Grip of Change* patriarchy uses to control them. This paper says that *The Grip of Change* does not just show women as people who are hurt by men, but it also shows how *The Grip of Change* women do things that help keep the system that limits *The Grip of Change* women in place, even if they do not realise, they are doing it.

The way Sivakami writes about Thangam and other women shows that the ideas of men being in charge and the rules of caste become a part of how Dalit women think. Dalit women start to judge what they do based on what society says is honourable, what their duty is and what is respectable. They do this when no one is watching. This means that the system that keeps them down stays in place because Dalit women themselves follow the rules, not just because someone is making them do it. Sivakami shows that this happens with Thangam and other female figures, and it is a problem for Dalit women.

The study shows that Dalit feminism needs to deal with the way people feel when they are oppressed. Fighting against the caste system and people who want to control others is important. It is not enough. To really be free, Dalit feminism needs to look at the things that women believe in and value, which they have learned over time. The story of Sivakami says that knowing about these beliefs that women have inside them is the step to resisting with their minds and this is a big part of Dalit feminism. Dalit feminism is very important here because it helps women understand what is happening to them.

The title, *The Grip of Change,* really shows the struggle that Dalit women face. *The Grip of Change* is about how society has a hold on us and also how the ideas we learn when we are young can control us. The word change means being able to break free from the things that people tell

us we have to do and from the ideas that we have learned. For Dalit women to be free, they have to question the things they have been taught for centuries because of the caste system and the way men have more power than women. Dalit women's freedom is, about *The Grip of Change* and what it means to them.

In conclusion, the novel presents a complex understanding of oppression where the battlefield is not only social but also psychological. By focusing on this internal dimension, the paper contributes a new perspective to the study of Dalit feminist literature and emphasises that mental liberation is essential for achieving true agency and autonomy.

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