



## THE MAN ARRESTING THE CHANGE IN THE GRIP OF CHANGE

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### ABSTRACT



The novel 'The Grip of Change' represents various aspects of Dalit experience. When the word 'Dalit' is used, it is generally observed that, it is being used as an umbrella term indicating the whole chunk of society which is subjected to oppression, bias and exploitation in the name of caste. But by close observation one can derive the inference that within the community there exists multifarious strata in which the epicenter of victimization do not oscillate but linger on women especially. The evidence is glaringly present in the novel 'The Grip of Change' in which women are subjected more to exploitation and suppression than their male counterparts even when it comes to the same community circles. The phrase 'Double Colonization' can be applied to Dalit women who are subjected to caste bias and male oppression which ultimately ruins their hopes on existence. A woman is susceptible to victimization as she depends on man for education and for identification, the identity mechanism itself involves recognizing a woman beside a man as woman could not stand on her own and without man their very existence is subjected to loss of respectable identity. My paper probes the intricacies that involved male domination and double colonization/oppression the woman undergoes in the novel 'The Grip of Change' because the man on whom the woman believed, could not deliver justice, moreover, he turns exploitative entity in her life.

**Keywords:** *Double Colonization, Identity, Gender Exploitation, Caste consciousness, Disintegration of the self.*



## INTRODUCTION

The novel 'The Grip of Change' is penned by P Sivakami, a woman Dalit activist and author who was an Indian administrative officer and working for the upliftment of the downtrodden communities in India. She is a vociferous political and social commentator on various platforms including social media. She wrote the novel 'Pezhayani Kazhidalum' in 1988 which was translated into English as 'The Grip of Change', in addition to this the writer has authored another remarkable novels of protest like 'Karakku Vettu', Nallum Thodarum, Kadaigal etc., which serve the purpose of waging a fight and formulating a protest against the caste oppression, gender discrimination and for political justice. 'The Grip of Change' is the story of a sad plight which a woman called Thangam's life has been subjected to constant exploitation and caste victimization. She is a widow, economically poverty ridden and ekes out her living depending on daily labor, whose earning of bread depends on the kindness of the upper caste landlords.

Her character is shown as a field on which various deceitful and ruthless forces are at play to their optimum levels. By studying her nature of existence in the novel one can easily understand the angst and agony the women suffer in the male dominated patriarchal system as patriarchy cannot exercise its immunity against caste exploitation because it works within the cast in its own structure. In 'The Wretched of the Earth', Franz Fanon states 'The colonized, underdeveloped man is a political creature in the most global sense of the term', but for a woman who belongs to the Dalit community, she even failed to be recognized as creature with any individuality but as an object on which injustice can be justified. The nature of oppression is identical to the oppression widely present in the post colonial third world countries. "The Third World discovers itself and speaks to itself through this voice. We know it is not a uniform world, and it still contains subjected peoples, some of whom have acquired a false independence, others who are fighting to conquer their sovereignty, and yet others who have won their freedom, but who live under the constant threat of imperialist aggression. These differences

are born out of colonial history, in other words, oppression." (Jean Paul Sartre's Preface to the Wretched of the Earth. Page 44)

## THE MAN IN 'THE GRIP OF CHANGE':

### a) Paranjyothi Udayar

"No one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility." (The Second Sex. 1949). The Characters of men in the novel belong to various levels of the society. They are from upper rungs of social ladder and lower rungs as well. Paranjyothi Udayar, the man and the land lord who belongs to the upper caste is the epitome of exploitation and injustice. He uses Thangam's body for the fulfillment of his carnal pleasures. It is an instrument for him to satisfy his cravings which sprout out from time to time.

He wants it to be a secret affair as he belongs to the higher class and it is looked down upon if anybody comes to know his affair with Thangam as she belongs to the underprivileged class. It does mean that he is supposed to maintain such relations with other women who does not belong to the lower castes but it is seen a heinous act if the relationship is maintained with Thangam, she suffers his oppression and exploitation because at the end of the day he is the person who measures her rice as wage for working in his own fields. Thangam is not independent in terms of individuality or in terms of economic status. She introduces herself as "I belong to the Hindu Scheduled Caste Community. I am a poor Parayar, an orphan, a widow. I earn my living by working for a daily wage" (Sivakami 11). Thangam is victim of class stratified Caste ridden society. She has no voice of her own which can be heard, she needs a male voice to voice her own pain and protest, she could not even think of protest against the injustice she would be met with on daily basis as she is so marginalized that the anguish which burst out her persona could not reach the centre of the society the panchayat. Among the downtrodden classes, there exists many sub classes, among these the class consciousness prevails as strongly as one would kill another if his class/caste sentiments are wounded.



“Pallars were agricultural laborers, Parayars were drummers and menials and the chakkiliyars were cobblers. The first grade Pallars were absent in Puliur. The Pallar were considered themselves superior to the rest. The Parayars considered themselves higher than the chakkiliyars, who themselves considered higher than the paravannars washer man community” (Grip of change. 63).

The injustice is so intense that even in the matters of adultery; the caste consciousness decides who has to be punished and whose offence has to be treated as negligible even to mention it. When upper caste women commit adultery, they were not asked to come to Panchayat to attend the proceeding of the law but it is not so in the case of Dalits. “Upper caste women commit adultery, is that addressed in the panchayat? Can we punish those women? They beat her up because we are lower caste, poor, and have no protection” (Grip of Change. 38). Moreover, Paranjyothi Udayar thinks that it is his right to molest Thangam as she belongs to the class and caste which has no right to protest and she should think that it is her good fate that he has wished for her so. He states that even his touch for her would prove as a gift for her life because such a great man from great caste laid his hands on her. “Ungrateful whore! Even if she was, hurt by the hand adorned with gold! A parachi could not have ever dreamt of being touched by a man like me! My touch was boon granted for penance performed in her earlier births! And then the dirty bitch betrays me! How can I face the world with my name thus polluted” (Grip of Change. 31). There exists anarchy of law, no touchability or no humane justice prevails, the justice is what is pronounced by the panchayat leaders of the upper caste, their machinations are termed as the enactments of law, their deliverance of proceedings are the edicts of legislature.

The lower casts are found in no unity, they are also divided in many possible ways. Their division is favored by the upper caste people because if they remain divided, they cannot turn their voice against the injustice and exploitation. Economical division and nature of caste based profession made fissures in the unity of the class which otherwise could have existed as strong as sticks when they are tied into a

single bundle. But fissiparous tendencies are favored and nurtured by the upper caste people so that they cannot become as a strong force against their hierarchy.

### **b) The Brothers in Law**

For Thangam, it is not just the man Paranjyothi Udayar, but many men from her own family (and caste) who like vultures ventured to exploit her and wanted to extract the pleasure from her body filed. After her husband's death, Thangam was left alone, she was childless and nobody was there to look after or to take care of her needs. She could not own her husband's share of land because the in-laws were not ready to pass over the share as she is childless; instead they wanted her to be their slave. “After my husband's death.... My husband's brothers tried to force me, but I never gave in. They would not give me my husband's land, but wanted me to be a whore for them”. (Grip of Change. 7). Here one can observe for a man, it is not the Caste or class even the woman from own family can be made man's victim. They show no sympathy or gratitude for their elder brother's wife. It is their responsibility to look after her, she would remain as a respectable family member in her family, but for Thangam it was an ordeal to live with them. They snatched her land, they steal of her position in the family, they denied her justified share in the collective property in the family and finally she was thrown away from house to work out her own fate. Men are men indeed.

### **c) Kathamuthu**

Another important male character in the novel is 'Kathamuthu' who also belongs to Dalit community but he himself does not think as a responsible individual who has to work for the dignity of his own community. He is an elected member to the Legislative Assembly of the state. But he never feels he too belongs to the community where his people are waiting for his support so that their cause of justice should be bolstered. Kathamuthu thinks that women are created just to be in position of wives and to give birth to children, as nothing more comes to their fate. Education, enlightenment, social positions, political justice must be available to Dalits but for men only. Kathamuthu is also a victim of



caste discrimination and suppression but he fought back and claimed his rightful position in the society as he got elected to the state assembly. After becoming respectable member of the assembly, he evinces his position as a respectable citizen but quite often he is ridiculed and his caste identity is highlighted as blight on his image. "His indirect exhibition of his caste consciousness irritates Kathamuthu. Once, someone brought to the notice of Kathamuthu, the comments of Naicker, "Poor fellow, he belongs to a lower caste. Can't you tell from his gross speech?" (Grip of Change. 18). Kathamuthu is supposed to be an anchor for his community, he should act as a role model for their emancipation and should augur their hopes for their rightful place in the society. Instead, he himself turns exploitative forgetting from where he has reached to the position in which he takes shelter now. The seeds of selfish agenda are present in abundance in Kathamuthu personality. He bent on criticizing and harming his own people because he wields the most obnoxious whip that is political power. "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." (Grip of Change. 149)

When Thangam approaches him with her complaint against Udayar family members who has beaten her for her involvement with Paranjyothi, Kathamuthu seeks Thangam as his mistress. She had to yield to his advancements, there was no way out. Her destiny is strangulated, there is no escape from the male exploitative hands whether it is Paranjyothi, or her own brother-in-laws or from the hands of the man Kathamuthu who belongs to her own community. In men there is not justice for her, even police who lodges her complaint turn in favor of upper caste people as advised by Kathamuthu. "Sami, these hooligans who beat me up, they should be jailed for at least a day and tortured. The pain is killing me."(Grip of Change. 5). Kathamuthu is not moved in spite of Thangam's lamentations of her

tribulations in the hands of hooligans arranged by Udayar's family. They beat and physically abuse Thangam; she experienced near death situation in their asura hands. Kathamuthu exploits the women of other castes too when they approach him for help. Nagamani is one of such women, she belongs to upper caste community but due to his political power nobody questions him even he exploits the women of non-Dalit community. Nagamani is a widow, she approaches for justice from her husband's family members but Kathamuthu instead of helping her, he himself subjugates her to satisfy his carnal cravings. Kathamuthu thinks that by enslaving her as his sex slave he is doing a favor to her. His perverted mind could not think any better than that. One can observe the similarities strikingly present between Paranjyothi Udayar's statement and Kathamuthu's statement in relation to the women they exploit. There exists no different in their attitude towards the women they exploit. "This is evident through the married life of Kathamuthu, the Paraya community leader and the caste Hindu widow Nagamani, in which she earns a rightful place by being installed as his wife in Kathamuthu's home. His generosity is high lightened when he says, I'm living with this woman who doesn't belong to our community. She is upper caste. She was a struggling widow, so I provided her a safe haven" (Grip of Change. 10).

Kathamuthu has held with the responsibility of facilitating the justice to Thangam; instead, he takes bribe from the Udayars and tries to settle the matter outside of the threshold of the court. Whatever complaint is given to the Police inspector, the nature and the draft of the complaint are deliberately changed so that the intensity and the direction of case would be side tracked and Udayars will be left out without any legal reprimand. For money, Kathamuthu can do anything; can destroy the people of his own caste. He is the corruption incarnate. 'You are such a bitch. I have changed the whole story. Don't you understand?' (Grip of Change. 12). Kathamuthu's own daughter Gowri is subjected to caste discrimination and bias in her own class and she shares her experiences with her father, yet he is unmoved and bent on his own manipulative exploitative attitude. The Kathamuthu self has



become non respondent and palliative to the vagaries of suffering of the people around him, people within his own family. "Gowri asked the student who was returning after getting her scholarship money: 'How much did you get?' 'For you, it is different', the girl replied. 'Aren't you from a Scheduled Caste?' Gowri enquired doubtfully. 'Nonsense! I am a Vanniyakula Kshatriya'. 'If you are not from a Scheduled caste, Just say no ! Why do you have to prefix 'nonsense'?" (Grip of Change. 95)

### GOWRI – THE VICTIM AND THE CHANGE

Gowri, the narrator of the story who is also author's voice in the novel starts to dislike her own caste to the extent that she feels ashamed of her mentioning the name of the caste even on scholarship form at her school. She might have hopes on her father, she might have believed that her father would come to her rescue and for her people in the community, but her hopes turned into despair and she is dismayed by her father's antipathy towards his own community which voted him for the seat in assembly.

Hadn't her father used his own caste for his selfish ends, she wouldn't have felt ashamed of mentioning the name of her caste on scholarship form. Hadn't Kathamuthu, through his mischievous attitude, further incarcerated his community people through robbing them of their right to have government schemes which are directed to their financial elevation, Gowri wouldn't have felt disappointed with the name of her caste. He is not messiah of the deliverance but an unrepentant hypocrite misusing his power and his social status for meeting his selfish ends. "Kathamuthu replies, That's my job, isn't it? I have no other work! Do you know when I had breakfast yesterday? At nine in the morning!. . 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 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" (Grip of Change. 36).

### CONCLUSION

Irrespective of their class or caste in the novel 'The Grip of Change', men behave on similar notes. They, despite being in the capacity to emancipate the victim of her victimization, never intended to raise even a single finger in her support. The progress in the social ladder and change in the economical status could not change the exploitative nature present in the important male characters of the novel.

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