



ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

UGC Approved Journal



Volume 6, Issue 11, November 2018

www.ijellh.com

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Expression and Suppression of the Self in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

Abstract

This article analyses P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*, the first novel by a Dalit woman. The work is structured as two Books- *Kathamuthu: The Grip of Change* and *Gowri: Author's Notes*. Here, *The Grip of Change* is examined as an autobiografiction, partly autobiography and partly fiction, which expresses and suppresses the self of the author. The prime concern of the novel is the twin oppressive structure of the society, with special emphasis on the patriarchal repressive mechanisms, that results in the objectification of Dalit Women. The Book Two is a re-entry into the novel after a decade. *The Author's Notes* confirms the singularity of the narrator, the protagonist, and the author. Memories, even if blurred, defy factual rearrangements and a philosophical dimension originates. In this part the author problematises and deconstructs the produced images, representations, narrative mode, characterisation, the process of writing, and finally the authorship itself. Retrospection and rumination also lead to contrasting portrayals. The non-linear development of both sections of the work moves from memory to memory and reflects the sophisticated psychological journey of the author. The confusions regarding entangled emotional and behavioural patterns and formations of misleading remembrances, causing instability in the author's conceptual map, finds expression in the novel and with more significance in *The Author's Note*.

Key words: autofiction, retrospection, hegemony, deconstruction, discourse

The theme of the double subalternity of Dalit women is repeatedly dealt with in Sivakami's works. Dalit women are marginalised by both caste system and patriarchy. In their case patriarchy achieves two forms, that of 'upper castes' and of their own men. As an extension to it, they belong to the lowest level in the pyramid structure of class division. Power relations, hegemonic discourses, and separatist tendencies force them to accept peripheral status; according to Sivakami, such factors are in an increased rate in rural areas. Her desire for faster social changes and attempt to promote women education find expression in her writings. Almost all of her works are autobiographical in nature.

Pazhainya Kazhithalum was published in 1989. Sivakami herself translated it into English in 2000. After a decade the author went through a self interrogation and the result was *Asiriyar kurippu*, translated as *Author's Notes*. The present edition of the work from 2006 onwards is divided into two books- *Kathamuthu: The Grip of Change* and *Gowri: Author's Notes*.

Book 1 is a sharp critique of the exploitation of the vulnerability of women. She deprecates objectification of Dalit female body by both 'upper caste' and Dalit men but more attention is given to atrocities from within. Various communal aspects as well are concentrated on. As the title suggests the story is centered on the character named Kathamuthu and the third person narrator is journeying through the perspectives of Gowri who herself is a character of the story. While, the second book is a relocation of the inner self through the re-examination of the psyche. The author, by challenging the existing structures of meaning deconstructs her own fictional representation of reality. In her journey back to the psyche she goes through the processes of meditation, rethinking, retrospection, recreation, and self- realisation. Still, the process of self- realisation remains incomplete and distorted.

Different dimensions of reality, duality in representation, and contrasting identity confuse the writer; which leads to the displacement of certain constructed principles. It does not argue the meaninglessness of all conceptual figures which are being generated, but points out the existence of unstable, multiple, and often conflicting meanings. Mohammed Hanif, the Pakistani novelist sates about the *Author's Notes* that it “takes a knife to her own work and dissects it with the hands of her own protagonist” (Hanif).

It is mainly through the character Thangam that Sivakami lambastes the oppressive patterns and mechanisms of the society which perceive female body as a mere object of sex, in *The Grip of Change*. Thangam, a childless widow, was a labourer under Paranjothi Udayar. Her husband's brothers rejected her land rights in the name of her childlessness. But in fact it was to avenge her firmness against yielding to their wishes. Her vulnerability forced her to depend upon Paranjothi and which was exploited by him. Her benumbed state in front of him remained a wound in her psyche. She was punished by the wife of Paranjothi and her brothers for the crime of being raped. Udayar's reaction, on her resistance against it with the help of Kathamuthu, was thus: “Ungrateful whore! Even if she was hurt, she was hurt by the hand adorned with gold! A Parachi could have never dreamt of being touched by a man like me! My touch was a 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?” (Sivakami 31). Kathamuthu whom she believed to be a brother and protector too raped her giving her liquor after locking his wives and daughter inside. In The Hindu literary review, it is said: “Being raped by Kathamuthu whom she has come to respect as an elder brother, is a greater betrayal for Thangam than the upper caste Udayar's savage lust” (Ramnarayanan).

Kanagavalli and Nagamani, the two wives of Kathamuthu are also representatives of repressed women in Dalit households. Kathamuthu's daughter Gowri was under strict control of her father and his words and actions pained her. The laws in the house were always one-

sided and she got no justice in confrontations with her stepbrothers. She became an introvert, rarely speaking, only interested in books and plants around the house. Likewise, Kathamuthu frequently asserted his identity as the 'man' of the house who is to be treated with all respect by the women of the house; the remedy for disrespect by wives, as he stressed, was another marriage. Gowri who was disappointed at such practices and found the enforcement of male desires upon women as beastly, gradually began to challenge patriarchal and polygamous traditions and which extended to the other women in the house. Education fastened her decisions and made her independent. She was determined regarding her desire to study against her father's wish of her marriage. The hatred towards her father's attitudes resulted in her denunciation of marriage. By repudiating marriage, she directly said: "The suffering that my mother underwent! I don't want to be tortured like her by some man.... Moreover, I need a father who can respect his son in law" (Sivakami124).

The novel presents the story of the fall of Kathamuthu who betrayed his family and community. He was a talented person to deal with the issues within the community and those which extended outside the community. He knew well about public machineries including the matters regarding law. He was clever enough to foresee things and act according to it. But he manipulated things not only for the benefit of the community but also for his own profit. His public life prioritised private ambitions. He grabbed money from whoever sought his help including those from other communities like jewelry owner Naicker and worse than that, his own community members who were extremely poor. Even if he helped them, his arrogant, coarse, and contemptuous behaviour dissatisfied the people. His self-praising nature, extolling his efforts at any given opportunity is ridiculed in the novel from the perception of Gowri. For the community members he was a "necessary evil" whom they had to totally rely upon in cases related to law, order, and rights. So, there were many people who were at his service at any time. Kathamuthu helped Thangam to get compensation but he actually was serving

himself. Gowri felt ashamed of using Thangam's money and she was very much conscious about the difference in the living conditions of themselves and other cheri people. She repeatedly expresses her disapproval of enjoying life eating and drinking when others were starving.

Landlords as well as authorities were afraid of Kathamuthu. So, his community members pinned their hope on him not only to solve dissensions among them but to find solutions to matters including issues with employers. It was quiet natural that Pichaipillai approached him when labour problems of Parayars became complicated in Puliur cheri. As retaliation to Thangam's complaint against Paranjothi Udayar, Parayars were excluded from manual labour. In between these issues a number of their houses and a few Chakkiliar huts too were burnt. Kannamma, who was almost blind, had seen a blurred image of the person who put fire to their houses. According to her, it was a person wearing mundu and veshti who did it. Her words led to a conclusion that 'upper caste' men did it. But, Kathamuthu too used to wear such dress and the author seems to suspect him though not directly expressed. Kathamuthu could thus strengthen the case against the landlords, diminish the separatist feelings among Chakkiliars and Parayars, and motivate them to react. Due to this manipulation they lost nothing as Kathamuthu managed to gain compensation. But he chose tricks rather than directly claiming for rights.

Kathamuthu's treatment of his own brother Kalimuthu was nefarious. He accepted lots of financial favours from Kalimuthu, who had settled in Malaysia and was in a good economical background. His brother sent him money for the maintenance of the house, for the funeral functions of their mother and whenever he got 'pathetic' letters from Kathamuthu. Kalimuthu was whole heartedly welcomed when he came back to their native place with handful of gifts, along with his son, after the death of his wife. As the man declared his intention to spend the rest of his life with his younger brother, Kathamuthu's attitude began to

change because he feared that the properties would be shared and understood that no more monetary benefits can be achieved from him. The respect given to Kalimuthu deteriorated and gradually Kathamuthu's manipulative tricks were applied against him faithlessly. He projected a distorted and execrable image of his elder brother. His fabricated erroneous stories could gain believers through eloquence. Even he was able to direct his wives' opinions regarding the issue though they were witnesses of all happenings in the house. Kalimuthu 'became' a criminal and murderer who was trying to escape from punishment. Both Kalimuthu and his son Chandran were driven out of the house in heinous way. The case was taken to the Panchayat and the lies and bargaining of Kathamuthu even in case of looking after their mother who was no more, shocked his brother. Gowri who no more wished to wear the undeserving bracelet gifted by Kalimuthu, gave it back to her periappa; this act aroused her father's anger and she had to face it. Thus, Kalimuthu is portrayed as a loving brother who was cheated by his brother.

The maintenance of his power among cheri people was always one of the priorities of Kathamuthu and for this purpose he tried to suppress other voices. He enjoyed the superior status of a leader. He silenced Rasendran who stood up to talk in the meeting called by authorities to discuss communal issues as he feared the rise of such young, educated, spirited, and daring men. Likewise, a man who directly questioned Paranjothi in the second meeting was pulled back by him. Their new ideas were opposed without proper reasons. The growth of Chandran as a leader among labourers caused uneasiness to him.

The very beginning of the novel itself is with deprecating kathamuthu's womanising nature; it is with abhorrence that it marks his disappointment at the unapproachable condition of his first wife who was sleeping with her children, which he understood when he peeped into the room after coming out of his bedroom where there was his second wife. The one, who usually was rude and uncivil towards his wives, acted and impressed the two in order to

misdirect them and rape Thangam. For this purpose, he had been carefully extolling the generosity and greatness of Thangam to dazzle her. At the end of the novel too, it is mentioned that women who were helping in Chandran's house on the day of his marriage left the place as soon as Kathamuthu reached there.

The Grip of Change ends with the fall of Kathamuthu who at last realises, as the title suggests- "Things have changed.... The ground beneath his feet was shaking. Earthquakes were emanating and floods were rising to change the very structure of the world" (Sivakami 126). Emergence of young leaders defied his power. His pride got blows during the marriage function of Chandran where a member of the Factory Workers Union did not obey to the execution of his interests and people joined to protect him against the imprecations and arrogance of Kathamuthu. The author points out that within a period of ten years, vast changes occurred in the social atmosphere and the 'grip of changes' was firm. A new consciousness emerged among people; education enhanced and intensified it. Labourers and women became conscious of their rights. Poverty decreased. Sivakami says:

In the ten years that followed, stark changes took place. A variety of goods flooded the markets. People earned more; consumerism kept pace with poverty. There were also welcome changes in attitude. People held the government responsible for not providing basic public amenities. Where there was a hole in a tar road people planted rice seedlings to draw attention to it. There were demonstrations every day. The women's movement was active- there had been a procession in which women had walked blindfold to symbolise the government's blindness with regard to them. Women protested against the practice of dowry. Consumer protection organisations emerged. Regressive aspects were being identified and crushed out of existence. (Sivakami 124)

The changes affected Kathamuthu's personal, familial, and social life. Others became less dependent on him. Subramani left him and joined the mill without seeking his permission

or without at least informing him. He lost in elections. The women in his house began to overcome their inferior position. Gowri, who became self-reliable, no more feared him and dared to execute her own decisions opposing her father. Kanagavalli and Nagamani influenced by the ideas of liberation laughed at the ideas and hopes of Kathamuthu. Sekaran also negated his father's control over him. When Kathamuthu criticised him for accompanying Chandran, he replied: "Don't worry Appa. Unlike some men we know, I am not into collecting wives and hoodwinking the world reciting stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata" (Sivakami 125). Kathamuthu's last hope was an announcement in the newspaper about the formulation of a new political party. For a few minutes he dreamt of an electoral seat in the label of the new party; he could win if Chandran helped and there would be the possibility of uprooting Chandran when power is gained. Everybody in the house laughed at his ambition of becoming a Member of Legislative Assembly, and he was capable of just pretend not to hear their comments. Gowri whole heartedly accepts the changes; with the symbolic representation of it, ends *The Grip of Change*:

The Jasmine bush hadn't been plucked for days. Withered flowers littered the ground. The flowers that had bloomed that day were spreading their heady fragrance, tightly closed new buds hung in bunches at the tip of every branch. Recognition of the life force in nature coursed through Gowri. She stood there, rooted by the thrill of awareness." (127).

The Book Two- *Gowri: Author's Notes*, focuses on the psyche of Gowri as signified in the title. It makes obvious that the character Gowri was the double of the narrator, similar to Clarrissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. In Woolf's work, the two people resemble, or are almost same in many physical, emotional and symbolic aspects, both in the deep and surface levels; but they are dissimilar too in various qualities. But in Sivakami's novel they are the same but just a curtain or gap between is deliberately created in front of the readers. If *Mrs. Dalloway* contains autobiographical

elements in abundance especially in psychological representation, this work is almost an autobiography and can be categorised as an autobiografiction. This is a term coined in 1906 by Stephen Reynolds (1881-1919), the British novelist, short story writer, and critic. He defines it thus:

A man, usually of an introspective nature, has accumulated a large body of spiritual experiences. He feels that he must out with it; *cacothés loquendi* is upon him. What is he to do? Fiction is impracticable. He does not wish, or is not able, to invent such a complicated apparatus for self-expression. Besides, the story's the thing in fiction. To use that medium would be to scatter and sink precisely the spiritual experience which he wants to record. Formal autobiography would present much the same difficulty - the introduction of a large amount of (for his purpose) extraneous matter - for a man's life and the events of it, chronological sequence and completeness, are the aim in autobiography. Essays, again, would be too disconnected and would scarcely admit of an attitude frankly egotistical enough. How, then, are the pitfalls of spiritual experience in bulk to be avoided? He invents a certain amount of autobiographical detail, or (which comes to much the same) he selects from his life the requisite amount of autobiographical material, adding perhaps a quantity of pure fiction, and on that he builds the spiritual experience, with that he dilutes it, and makes it coherent and readable. The result is autobiografiction, a literary form more direct and intimate probably than any to be found outside poetry. (Reynolds 28)

Thus, an autobiografiction is half autobiography and half fiction; the opportunities and scope of both genres can be employed. It can express and suppress the self. It does not require sequential representation and omission of unnecessary and undesired details is possible. Intention of incomplete communication can be satisfied especially in case of unpleasant and secret matters which the author is anxious about the reader's response. Chance for interchangeability in characterisation and stratification of experiences remains. Moreover,

autobiografiction allows impersonation and anonymity of the author to a great extent. Many fictional works may have the presence of the writer in it, and in most of them autobiographical elements would be in a large proportion. Such works belong to the category of autobiographical fiction. Autobiografiction and autobiographical fiction differ as autobiografiction goes intensely far from the apparent level of circumstantial revelation of the author's life. Spiritual and psychological realms of life are explored in autobiografiction.

In her return to the novel or the memories of her own life, the author is confused with contrasting images. She is at the same time justifying herself and challenging and deconstructing her attitudes, characterisation, and even the process of writing and authorship. The beginning pages of the *Author's Notes* itself declare the oneness of Gowri, the narrator and the novelist; the whole Book 2 explains this singularity beyond all doubts. As the author mentions, like the remaining burnt bricks keeps the traces of the destroyed Indus valley civilisation, her memories exist as incomplete images as time blurred them. Remembrances and thoughts are flowing in the mind of the author and they are ordered in the way it comes to the mind. The narrative is a journey from memories to memories and they reflect the novelist's mental agony. Many of them are not well connected with each other but are not confusing the readers and clarify the psychological dilemmas of the author. The memories are repeatedly announcing the direct presence of the author in the novel. Some of the memories are diverting from the main focus like that of Saroja and Kuldip, but finally gives an account of the way they contributed to her conceptual map or how her thought process decided her reaction towards the incidents and behavioural patterns in relation to them. Sivakami hid her awareness of Saroja's immoral relationship with Rangasami as she feared that if the story is revealed, he may take a second wife and his children would suffer; where she could see her own face in those children and it reflect her painful experiences as the first wife's child in a polygamous family. In the like manner, experiences of her younger sister to whom

Sukumaran misbehaved when she went to direct him to the way to the field, Lilly whose dhavani was stolen by Gnanakoothan while taking bath, Suja who was visited by her brother in law with mischievous aims, and Kuldip to whom D.P Singh played trick were shaping her attitude on the ill treatment of women by men. Manickam amma's story has some link with Thangam. The writer expresses her confusion on whether Manickam's immoral relationship with Rangam Pillai, in whose field she was working, can be justified. On one hand, she is a widow and she has to bring up four or five children and on the other hand, sexual liaison is contemptuous. The case of Thangam is the same except that she is childless. The mentioned story of a boy killed by Rangam Pillai for stealing peanuts reflects her view on caste atrocities.

When the author returns to her native place, so much change had happened to the town, the house, the atmosphere, and to the people. "Those images that she had created no longer existed..." (Sivkami 131). She too did change; her attitudes and outlook differed. She begins to observe everything in a new perspective and other possible dimensions are analysed. She begins to deconstruct certain pictures produced in the novel as she doubted whether they were facsimiles. She makes internal queries whether she had tried to justify her personal view points: "...why did she try so hard to justify her work? Look at her! Here she was, analysing her novel, trying to fit all the pieces into logical patterns. To whom did she owe explanations?" (Sivakami 134).

Questions regarding the entrance of author's personal interests and bias arise. The novelist makes confessions on the exclusion and inclusion of selected facts:

...why hadn't she written about the mad son and his mother? Why did she have to write about the village, the caste clash, etc? How did the problem of the Puliur cheri become subject matter for the novelist? How does one choose what to omit and what to select? Hadn't the mad elder brother existed even during the time of novel's conception? (Sivakami 139)

In the novel, only two siblings were presented- Gowri and Sekaran; but there were twelve brothers and sisters in actual life. Against the previous image created about her mother who was enjoying better facilities, she is a depressed woman in the Book Two who even think of suicide. She was extremely sad about her son who became mad. What really happened to him is unknown. He had stopped working for a few days after a quarrel with his boss, but one day he decided to rejoin and sought the blessings of his mother. The next day he was in jail accused of being attempted to drive a bus parked in the bus stand. He was cruelly beaten up. From that day onwards he had strange behavioural patterns and which affected his family life too. The author indicates that his wife and children began to be indifferent towards him. Her brother had some abnormal tendencies in his childhood itself. He tried to commit suicide when he was studying in seventh standard. He once ran away from home. Catching poisonous snakes and riding bicycles laying on it thrilled him. There were more unexpressed troubles in her family. Her father was enchanted by his other wife and behaved deplorably towards her mother, brother and to herself. Her step mother and her children were hostile towards them. They made up stories to attack them and played many tricks to provoke them in front her father. He acted according to their wish. These were considered offence if Gowri made a tea for herself and if Sekaran who was working hard to earn for the family took some coconut oil. Her step brother was jealous of her high scores in examinations and once spoiled her report card. She slapped him but to her father, it was her mischief and she was severely punished. Amma reacted only when the suppression of her children was unbearable.

The names given to the characters were different from the people in the real life who were being represented in the novel. Sivakami became Gowri when Palanimuthu was named Kathamuthu. Her mother's real name was Thandayi and stepmother was Chellammal. The last chapter of *The Author's Notes* reveals her personal and family details. It also include her birth place, caste, particulars of members in that joint family, properties they owned, and the

details of her father's political career and life as a farmer, which were not accurately described in the novel. Untrue information regarding the unity of Parayars and Vanniars originated from her desire for their development together cooperating with each other and for a more progressive leadership.

The Author's Notes stresses on the many sidedness of vision. The narration here has transfigured to be highly philosophical. Long conversations take place within the mind of the author where consciousness is duel. They either end in confusion or the defeat of the author in front of the individual. Theme of death is constantly dealt with and as adjunct arrive concepts of soul, truth and the like. Philosophical stories based on life values are considered. In connection to the characters in the novel, the notions of 'triviality', 'vulnerability', 'widowhood', 'protection', 'morality' and so on are weighed in the mind. At one point, the author reaches a mental condition denouncing meaning and value. Both her personal life and public life is viewed as uncertain. Rotating movement of chaos and clarity dominates author's psyche. When she turns too much philosophical, thoughts deviate to varied areas and characters outside the novel. Novelist's conversations with the psyche express confusions regarding whether the author was mocking her community members and on whether her pride of being on the right way in service was just an illusion. The conclusion of the novel too is with a long conversation preparing to reveal and realise the self and identity.

Sivakami deconstructs characterisation in the novel. Though certain aspects are justified, some factored out pictures are uncovered and obscured facets are cogitated. She ruminates on whether there was an attempt from her part to glorify Gowri's character and to conceal her faults. The character of Kathamuthu is gone through serious thought process. She makes self-interrogations:

Had she planned to wreak vengeance on his mockery? His taunts, jibes, sneers? Is that why she wrote of her father as a fraud who used his commitment to serve the poor as a façade to line his own pockets?

In her novel she had painted Kathamuthu as a villain who had taken the money that belonged to Thangam. But in real life, her father had been a benevolent man. He had been kind to the poor. When they came with petitions for help, he had fed them with whatever he could afford. Perhaps the character Kathamuthu was not based on her father? Could it be that the character was drawn from her general impression of politicians who took bribes even from their poor constituents? Irrespective of whether Kathamuthu was based on her father or not, was she an ideal person? (165)

From the diary of Kathamuthu the author later learns that Kathamuthu was ready to do anything, even go to the extent of begging, to educate his children. He wanted his children to be proud of doing agricultural activities but Gowri was ashamed to do such works. Her Amma had once tried to make her understand how he was proud of his daughter who was brilliant in her studies and how hard he was trying to make money to get her educated. Similarly he went to meet a lawyer to complain on the incident in the hostel that somebody tried to climb into her room at night; there too the lawyer's wife told her about her father's struggle against financial difficulties in order to educate her. Still, she was disappointed at his nature of ridiculing her in front of others. Thus Kathamuthu had both negatives and positives. The writer feels that the novel concentrated on his negatives more than positives. In several cases she repeats the attitude presented in the novel but at the same time repents on her blindness towards his virtues and also on her total denunciation of him.

Author tries to remember how the relationship between her and her father was thwarted. Once he had loved her and she too loved him. He used to pour oil on her hair, bathe her with siakkai and arappu mixture, dry her hair with her head on his lap, and comb it with

his fingers. Situation differed after the entry of more women and children in his life. He became harsh towards his first wife and children. As the novel observes, he had begun to manhandle his second wife too when he got a third woman who was younger and more beautiful.

The novelist is confused by the contrasting nature of her father; she moves through the experiences and viewpoints of many others. Her Athai told her that she had claim to her grandmother's jewellery but she lost it between the brothers- her father and Periappan who are known in the novel as Kathamuthu and Kalimuthu. Kathamuthu was angry with her as she disapproved the suggestion of the marriage between her son and his elder daughter. But when she suffered from illness, he looked after her very well. She described her experience of escape from a Gounder who tried to rape her. Author's father wept hearing this and the depiction of this incident challenges the image of Kathamuthu as a womaniser. Author makes queries on her psychological process which formulated certain embodiments:

The incident perhaps explained the motivation of Kathamuthu, the protagonist of the *Grip of Change*. In the novel, the widow Thangam is beaten up for sleeping with Udayar. She seeks help and justice from Kathamuthu, a leader of the Parayar community. He concludes that she was subject to a specific kind of violence because she belonged to an oppressed caste. But the novelist had presented it from an entirely different perspective! That Thangam had merely been punished for her immoral behaviour and that Kathamuthu had intervened and succeeded in blowing it up into caste-related violence. The impression created was that the upper castes had handled the incident a man-versus-woman problem, whereas the lower castes had given it the caste slant. How did the novelist dare to distort history with such impunity? (155)

Once a man came to her house to advise that her writings are to be stopped and indicated her attitude towards her father is wrong. This disturbed her mind. A conversation with her mother's cousin, whom too she called Periappa, challenged the figures in her

conceptual map in relation to Kathamuthu and Kalimuthu. Kalimuthu was not a completely innocent person as portrayed in *The Grip of Change*. Kalimuthu and his wife accused Gowri of stealing a four-anna coin and spread the story in the whole town when she was a mere child. Agreeing with what Periappa said, she points out that as against the portrayal in the novel Kathamuthu loved and respected elders. Sivakami feels that she always looked her father with suspicion and this affected her father. He was disappointed at her representation of the character Kathamuthu in the novel. He pondered on the character Kathamuthu in the novel. Though he believed that they are not the same and are different from each other, he tended for a comparative analysis and assumed that his daughter defaced him as reprisal. Likewise, the author reacted on hearing her father's illness thus- "What can I do? It's the hundredth time that he is seriously ill. He will drive us crazy before he actually dies" (Sivakami 139). But "He had become a corpse, ridiculing her, hours before she arrived" (140). The writer's remorse at the uttered words is visible in the whole Book.

The author raises two more questions to herself on whether a polygamous man can be a sex addict and whether she had a tendency to picture male characters as betrayers of woman. The image of Kathamuthu as a rapist reached its worst form with the presentation of Thangam's plea to Kathamuthu- "You are like a brother to me". But that word really came from Valina. Once both Sivakami and her friend Valina got drunk and Valina's cousin tried to sexually exploit her. This incident was transformed into the rape of Thangam by Kathamuthu. Writer's fault too was hidden behind it as she herself indicates: "Nothing in the novel was untrue. But the novel was false, she felt. Characters were mixed up with events not related to them. She wanted to share her experiences, but her own self and identity. The novelist had been saved, but what about the novel? She raised her hands to cover her face in shame" (Sivakami 150). The writer states that her traumatic experiences in childhood and partial and prejudiced characterisation led to the creation of 'Kathamuthu'.

The Author's Notes is not presenting Kathamuthu as a flawless character. She is confused in between his negatives and some positives and sometimes contrasting opinions too emerge as her mind goes through a conflict. He was very harsh towards her and used foul language during conversations. He also used to beat and punish her severely. Sometimes he treated her and her mother as mere objects. To end up her "arrogant" nature, the remedy he found was to find some "customers" for her. He used to ridicule Gowri in front of others without ever thinking how it affected her. He upheld patriarchal values and wanted to assert his domination and superior status even at old age. When her father, mother and step mother went to Kasi as Gowri was working in Allahabad, the Brahman priest appreciated her for bringing them there but Kathamuthu retorted that it is he who brought them all. Likewise, on the way back she was unable to get reservation tickets and they had to stand in the train. It affected her father's health. He, in a worst language criticised her. Her step mother as well as brothers and sisters blamed her that she disrespected, insulted, and negated him. But her mother justified and consoled her and criticised her father's nature. He did not inform her about the date on which he was intending to leave and while she asked, he interpreted it as she was eager to send them back. She solaced her by saying that she has done all possible services to them which is not done by the people who criticised her. She added that her husband is a fraud who may whole heartedly accept her salary and will curse her if she asked him money for daily expenses.

The characters like Chandran and Thangam are also deconstructed. The novelist introspects and tries to find out a connection between Thangam and Kuttaippan's wife who is said to be the concubine of Reddiyar. She doubts whether the rape of Thangam by Paranjothi was just the imagination of the author. A contrasting view is also presented in the book where she deconstructed earlier attitude in the novel regarding the manipulation the case of Thangam as a caste issue; in Book Two, she believes that it may be true that she was

unable to protest due to hierarchical norms of caste. Manickam amma is also indirectly connected with Thangam. Pramod Nayar comments: “ ... Thangam’s story is given to ‘the latest interpretation’ with each narration” (376).

Chandran’s character derived out of her longing for an effective, straight forward and sincere leadership of younger generation. She used him to challenge self-destructing patriarchal regulations of power relations. Chandran’s determination that his wife would be his equal partner produces a new light against decadent factors ruling the society. The *Author’s Notes* announces that Chandran was just like all other workers in the mill, not a model leader who skillfully organised the co-workers.

An image of poverty is newly produced in the second Book. In the beginning of *The Author’s Notes*, there is a picture of children dressed in rags searching for something to eat in the bag of the writer. There was nothing in the house to make tea and her Amma gave money to a ten years old girl who was waiting with a worn container to buy some tea. In order to reduce consumption of electricity, low voltage bulbs were used in her house. Worn and spoiled pillows and sheets were in use. Children satisfied with old saris instead of blankets. Gowri in her childhood had only one dhavani to wear. In school, the head teacher scolded her for that and advised to borrow one from Shenbaga. Shenbaga’s parents were reluctant to lend dress to a Dalit girl. But the humiliation transformed as fury against her father. Blaming her father, she blustered to her mother: “Your husband has the money to drink and sleep around with women, but he can’t spare some for a dhavani? He has fathered a house full of children, why can’t he die instead of putting us to such shame? I can’t even borrow a piece of cloth because of my caste! I want to kill myself!” (Sivakami162). This hurt her father and he bought new dhavanis by pawning her mother’s nose-ring. Her thali was already pawned. He went to the school and expressed his dissatisfaction at their attitude. He remarked that those who are getting lots of donations and money may not be able to understand the difficulties of

a farmer who wear worn emaciated chappals. He reminded them that their duty is to teach. Similarly, it was by collecting pig shit that novelist's father earned money. Except school time they all worked in fields.

A discussion on the imperfections of the illustration of caste is considered. Those to be presented remained unrepresented; when presented sometimes lacked totality and accuracy. Clear distinction of caste and class was unrecorded. Sometimes the author conformed to and compromised with existing norms. Remembrances of certain incidents like reluctance of Shenbaga's parents to lend her dress and separation in serving food during the puberty celebration of her classmate Chandrika disturbs the novelist. The narrated caste unity was an expression of a suppressed wish. Hierarchical stratifications within communities found no adequate rendition.

As far as Sivakami as an author is concerned, the text marks the growth of the budding writer up to the stage of the writing of the present work. In her childhood popular works, general concepts, and institutionalised education system confused her and tended to misdirect her. They extolled literatures with obvious conclusions, creating worlds of imagination and fantasy full of dramatic events, discouraging marginal literary trends. Works of social concern emanated from real life experiences are rejected. Her failure in presenting a romantic view of life in stories invited criticisms in initial times itself, inside and outside educational institutions. This discussion ultimately ends in a deconstructive analysis.

Sivakami deconstructs herself as an author in the Book Two and the process of writing is put under question. As communicated in the work, the novelist moved away from actuality and real concerns.

The novelist had to bend and twist her stories to prescribed endings....she felt that she was guided by the reader rather than by her own instinct. At times both seemed to be the same,

until she carefully analysed them. Why did she have to change herself so much to suit the reader? Or was the change a mask that she willingly wore to attract attention? (Sivakami 160)

At one point the novelist feels the death of herself and her book; words are no more significant when antithesis turns to be thesis. Comprehension of expressed meanings was incomplete even if many voices were heard. Further movement was obstructed and distorted. The aim of complete communication of the intentions and expectations of the author led to unrealistic representation of characters and incidents; it fostered falsehood. Recording the perception of life according to personal interest is not to be encouraged. There emerges the question, whether a work would be of literary merit, if it reflects the attempt of the writer to find answer to the questions on life originated in her mind or if it represents aspects from narrow understanding of life. Author's observations on life as a whole is put under question as there developed a suspicion on whether she was conventionally moved being unable to find new elements. The one who wrote *The Author's Notes* "had travelled quite a distance from the novelist. She saw herself differing from the hopeful and egoistic novelist. She felt alienated from the novel, *The Grip of Change*" (Sivakami 183). C. S Lakshmi notes:

The act of writing is always accompanied by doubts, hesitation, despair and anguish. In the process of writing itself there is embellishment, exaggeration and selection. One is constantly holding back certain things and allowing some other elements to gain priority. Writing is not about truth but about experiencing a truth in many different ways. Writing cannot reflect reality but it can enhance, diminish and obliterate reality. Sivakami's sequel to the novel is about this process of writing, about choosing some and leaving out others, about deep-lying hatred that can alter truth, and about life experiences that change perspectives. (199)

Criticisms affect the author; the only person accepting the novel is her mother. She suspects that the "institutionalised education of the unquestioning kind and her mother's influence ruled high in her novel" (188). She fears isolation from Amma too. The writer, as

an individual, gets the impression of separation from actuality of experiences and lack of 'life' in her language, in between mechanical directions which suited 'construction' of stories. If the writing is not in perfect proportion with life realities, it would turn out to be a mere formation which brings monetary benefits and appraisals undeserved. The author also feels estrangement from the language of common people belonging to Dalit communities, in a work portraying them. She cogitates on whether the priority given to 'standard' written language outlined the map limiting its scope, where author's prejudices on the binary of inferiority and superiority worked. The novel ends with these words meditating on the expression and suppression of the self:

Dear critic, enough, did you have to focus on me, of all people? Why do you play with me, making one half known and the other unknown?

Why do I do it? You silly... because you were proud that your novel had been widely discussed...self examination... (Sivakami 190)

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