

**DALIT FEMINISM: A TRANSFORMATION OF REJECTION INTO RESISTANCE****PUNYASHIL S. TEMBHURNE**Assistant, Prof. Dept. of English  
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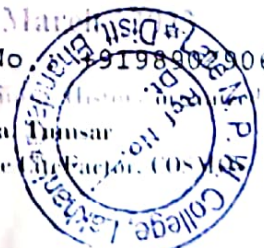
**ABSTRACT**

*From time immemorial women have been the subject of victimization, oppression and subjugation by the patriarchal society which always prefer to see women in the periphery. When the question arises about Dalit women, the situation worsens as the Dalit women are considered the subaltern of the subalterns. They are the oppressed among the oppressed as they are exploited double – by the patriarchal society as a whole and by the Dalit patriarchy. But the history of discrimination and traumatic experiences of the Dalit women has not been effectively heard and represented as it lacks agency owing to the homogenization of the similar experiences of the elite class women. In this regard, several Dalit women writers took the initiative to register their literary presence through autobiographies, memoirs, narratives etc. with the main objective to expose the society which has objectified them, discriminated them, victimized them, stripped them off their identity and always looked upon them with a patronizing stance. The present article aims to highlight the plight of the Dalit women, the multiple layers of oppression and the struggle towards emancipation, as depicted in the literary writings of some selected Dalit women writers.*

**Keywords:** Victimization, Marginalization, Subaltern, Oppression, Dalit, Patriarchy, Traumatic Experience

**Introduction**

Writing on Dalit life is an emerging field wherein a writer takes up the role of an agent, expresses various dimensions of oppression through literary mediums such as autobiography, memoirs, diaries etc. and urges the crucial need of humane approach towards the deprived section of society, i.e. the Dalits. The term Dalit comes from the word 'dal' which means broken, ground-down or oppressed. Since the beginning of human civilization and the unjust caste system of society, the Dalits have been subjected to oppression of various kinds. In the name of untouchability, they have been marginalized, discriminated against equal opportunities, deprived of basic human rights, relegated, victimized and tortured in diverse ways. These atrocities in the name of aged-old tradition forced the Dalit to protest against injustices by means of literary writings and also by forming organization like Dalit panthers. the following excerpt from Satyanarayana and Tharu evidently proves it







"... the real originality and force of Dalit writing, which today comprises a substantial and growing body of work, can be traced the decades following the late 1960s. Those were the years when the Dalit Panthers revisit and embrace the ideas of Babasaheb Ambedkar, and elaborate his disagreements with the essentially Gandhian mode of Indian Nationalism, to begin a new social movement. In the following decades, Dalit writing becomes an all-India phenomenon. This writing reformulates the caste question and reassesses the significance of colonialism and of missionary activity. It resists the reduction of caste to class or non-Brahminism and vividly describes and analyses the contemporary workings of caste power." (21)

### Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

*The Grip of Change* is the English translation of Pazhayani Kazhidalum (1988), the first Tamil novel by a female writer. It is comprised of two books:

Book 1: Katha Muthu: *The Grip of Change* and its sequel, Book 2: Gowri: Author's Notes. Palanimuthu Sivakami wrote the first book when was twenty-six and the sequel ten years later. The protagonist of Book 1, Katha Muthu, is a charismatic Parachi leader with two wives<sup>7</sup>. The novel opens as a Parachi woman, Thangam, finds refuge at Katha Muthu's after having been seriously beaten up by the relatives of her upper caste employer because her in-laws spread rumors about her having an affair with the latter, a married man. Katha Muthu uses his influence within the village caste hierarchy to obtain some sort of justice for Thangam while still looking down on her as an inferior being since she is but a woman. In the second book, Gowri, Katha Muthu's daughter, that the readers see grow up in the first book, compares the town of her memories which inspired the writing of *The Grip of Change* to what she observes as a thirty-one-year-old woman. Gowri is the fictional author of *The Grip of Change* – though the question of whether or not she is to be understood as a younger Sivakami is left open –. The sequel contrasts what happened in her family and community to her interpretations of those events and thus points to the gaps in the narrator's knowledge and understanding of past events. This undermines her authorial reliability, while also pointing to her gained maturity and autonomy at the end of the narrative. In this book, it is Thangam's body which takes center stage. Thangam is rejected by her in-laws who refuse to give her the land she should receive. She is raped and exploited and is almost beaten to death at the beginning of the novel. She is considered as a useless woman since she is childless and widowed. Her broken up body shows how vulnerable Dalit women are to male sexual assault and harassment. Since the narrative hinges on Thangam's body and the abuse she suffers, a mute woman whose existence was marginalized becomes central to the plot and, in an amazing turn of events, her ordeal can even spark a caste riot (Meena Kadasamy " 2005, 194).

Eventually, Thangam obtains justice; her in-laws are forced to give her some land. She repays Katha Muthu by physically yielding to his desires, but she also manages to use the very body which had been subjugated and oppressed to gain power in Katha Muthu's house and dominate his first two wives. The novel is also an expression of Dalit youth's eagerness to work for change and sociopolitical progress. The first book ends with an enumeration of vast economic, social and political changes with which the elderly cannot keep up. Katha Muthu's wives, accustomed to the patriarchal system in which they had evolved till then are unable to





envision any changes when Gowri eagerly evokes the women liberation movements. "Gowri constantly goaded Kanagavalli and Nagamani with talks of women's liberation. However, both women were used to bending to Katha Muthu's demands. They were happy for Gowri, but felt it was too late for them" (125). The novel concludes on an optimistic note for the younger generation as Gowri defies her father and refuses to marry. She manages to win her independence by completing her studies, she gets a doctorate and then a teaching job. The novel thus ends on the long road ahead for women Dalits to obtain full and equal rights.

### **Gogu Shyamala's Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But**

Father May be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But... by Gogu Shyamala is a collection of twelve stories translated from Telugu by nine individual translators, men and women alike. In her back-cover review of the 2012 Navayana edition, Susie Tharu argues that Shyamala's collection of short stories could be the prototype of a new genre that might be called not "short" but "little" stories after the "little magazines" written by the Telugu press since the 1960s. The term "little" refers to the Dalit subaltern customs that the stories give access to as opposed to grand Hindu national traditions. The stories are autobiographical since they are based on the writer's childhood memories. The title of the story derives from this old saying which suggests Dalit women are the main breadwinners and providers of the family and, despite being seemingly weak, they are needed when a family could survive without a man. patriarchy is doubly undermined since the father does not dare stand up to his mother, and his wife turns out to be the vital force of the family.

### **Shilpa Raj's The Elephant Chaser's Daughter**

She is a young woman who comes from a family that has experienced hardship all through their lives. The author is already getting recognition from reviewers for her wonderful work as an upcoming artist. This piece of literature is the first of its kind by someone of her age and background – 23 years of age and from an "untouchable" caste. Shilpa Raj has a purposeful road ahead of her as she plans to use her voice to create awareness on social issues and work as an author and a psychologist. Starting at the age of sixteen, Shilpa persevered her dream for the next seven years to become a writer. Her literary style stands out for its realism as she narrates her story with raw authenticity, and not as imaginative fiction. This maiden book, *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*, will become available in India from July 28. Shilpa is the first one in her family to complete a high school education. While writing her memoir, she continued her college education towards an MSc degree in Psychological Counselling. Many reviewers believe that her work is inspiring to a wide audience of young people as they will relate to her search for personal identity in the context of a larger social and challenging traditional environment. The usage of simple language and a captivating writing style are evidence of her maturity as an author who reaches out to both young and old. This memoir will surely touch the conscience of people as it candidly addresses delicate personal and social issues — the author being a witness or the main character, and not a bystander. Shilpa is featured in a prominent role in the Netflix Original Series documentary, *Daughters of Destiny*, which will be released at the end of July. In the film, she narrates from her book – a touching element that brings considerable sensitivity to the story of the five young women including Shilpa, whose lives have been transformed by the education they received. We



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keep this section updated with further details on Shilpa and the reception for her book by the reading fraternity once it reaches bookstores all over the country.

Coming Out As Dalit a memoir" is Dutt's personal story as to how she, as a middle-class Dalit belonging to a family with two generations of government servants, navigates herself while aspiring for a life that has been ingrained in her to only belong to the upper caste. It's a moving account that brings to light how casteism is mired even in the most progressive and urban spaces, such as universities, corporate houses, media offices, and how Indian society is anything but post-caste.

Author Yashica Dutt's journey into discovering herself and, accepting the myriad ways in which her identity and her caste are intertwined, is remarkable. Because as she starts learning about Dalits and, the insidious as well as explicit discrimination that Dalits are subjected to in all spheres of their lives, she nudges the reader to perceive the world from the prism of discrimination.

This jolts you into coming to terms with the injustices that have been meted out to Dalits since time immemorial on the basis of arbitrary notions of what constitutes an "upper caste" and who belongs to a "lower caste", and that still continues to this day. There is absolutely no rational explanation behind the division of society into four Varna, except for maintenance of the status quo by the ones who benefit from this segregation.

Dutt provides her readers with not just her personal story but also acquaints us with the history of caste-based discrimination and the Dalit movement. Therefore, for anyone seeking initiation into learning more about casteism and how terribly it afflicts a Dalit, and how opportunities that are made available to upper-castes are, in one way or another, an outcome of their privilege

### Conclusion

Dalit literature is an arduous endeavor from the canonical to the peripheral, from mega narratives to micro-narratives, from resistance to emancipation and self-affirmation. Through their writings, the Dalit women writers sum up their mental and physical agony, their domestic problems and issues, brutal behavior, inhuman treatment, miserable state of condition, in their own style. Dalit women writers whose works are examined in this article gained international visibility through English translation. English translation made these texts available to a larger audience and the socio-political struggle of Dalits and Dalit women was given broader scope and recognition worldwide. These works wonderfully documented lived experience of poverty, violence, dejection and misery that every Dalit woman experiences in rigid caste hierarchies. They are also a narrative of reconstruction of self that a Dalit woman achieves after going through the traumatic experience in society in the hands of both patriarchy on one hand and the upper-class society on the other hand.

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