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**Architecture of Space: Domestic, Public, and Political Spaces in P. Sivakami's Works****Christina Sylvia.I**, Ph.D Research scholar, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore.**Dr. Dr. Anin Leema**, Assistant professor of English, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore.

**Abstract:** The interwoven systems of patriarchy and caste are questioned in P. Sivakami's fiction not only through her characters but also through the places they live in. Her 1989 book, *The Grip of Change* and the Author's Notes that go with it show how space is socially constructed, controlled, and contested on all levels domestic, public, and political. Dalit women's lives take place in environments that both define and confine them, mirroring caste and gender-based hierarchies that identify their marginality. However, Sivakami also shows acts of compromise in which Dalit women turn repressive environments into places of resistance. Through the lens of feminist geographies and Henri Lefebvre's theory of the "production of space," this paper argues that Sivakami's works highlight the spatial politics of Dalit women's lives by revealing how homes, streets, and courts both encode power and provide opportunities for subversion.

**Keywords:** P. Sivakami, Dalit literature, space, feminist geography, caste, *The Grip of Change*



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## Introduction

Because Dalit women's writing highlights the dual marginalisation that occurs at the crossroads of gender and caste, it holds a significant place in Indian literature. One of the most significant voices in this field is P. Sivakami, whose Tamil novel *The Grip of Change* was the first to receive critical acclaim written by a Dalit woman. In addition to being a tale about gender and caste oppression, the book and its later Author's Notes also explore the structure of social life. Sivakami demonstrates that space is never neutral in her story.

It is demonstrated that power pervades governmental institutions, public spaces, and domestic interiors, influencing who is included, excluded, and in charge. Studying space in Sivakami's writings is essential because it shows how oppression is ingrained in relationships as well as in the structure of the geography of life itself. This paper makes the case that Sivakami's novels show how Dalit women negotiate and challenge the complex politics of space, drawing on feminist geographies that connect spatial control to gender hierarchies and Henri Lefebvre's idea of the "production of space" (1991).

## Theoretical Framework: The Production of Space and Dalit Feminist Lenses

In his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre makes the case that space is a social construct rather than just a geographical area. It is created by the interplay of ideology, practice and power. In this way, residences, towns, streets, and courts serve as settings where hierarchy is established rather than as neutral backgrounds. By demonstrating how women's bodies are policed through geographical limitations, restricted to domestic responsibilities, public monitoring, and exclusion from organisations that make decisions, feminist geographers expand on this concept (Massey 1994).

Space is governed twice for Dalit situations. Dalit women experience caste-based exclusion from public and religious settings, as well as patriarchal domination in the home. Therefore, interpreting Sivakami through the lens of feminist geography and Lefebvre reveals how her stories reveal the intersectional production of space, where gender, caste, and class come together to limit Dalit women's freedom of movement and sense of belonging.

## Domestic Spaces: Homes as Sites of Power and Confinement

*The Grip of Change* uses the home as a focal point to show how patriarchy functions in Dalit homes. Even if Dalit men like Kathamuthu assert their leadership in politics and society, their power is reflected in the household. The family depends on the unpaid work of women to cook, clean, and raise children, but their voices are silenced behind these walls. This constraint is exemplified by Thangam's character. Being a Dalit widow who is sexually exploited, she is both ensnared by the limitations of the household unit and reliant on it for survival. The home turns from a haven to a place of policing, where her autonomy, choices and sexuality are continuously observed.

However, Sivakami does not portray women as helpless victims. Women together express their complaints via domestic disputes, gossip, and group housework. Through expressing their discontent in the household, Dalit women quietly undermine patriarchal authority. Therefore, even though the home environment is oppressive, it also harbours seeds of discontent.

## Public Spaces: Streets, Fields, and Social Surveillance

Sivakami looks at the common spaces, fields, and village streets where Dalit women's presence is obviously regulated outside the house. Public space is constantly under examination in her writings. Streets are humiliating places where Dalit women run the risk of being verbally or physically attacked and where mobility is dictated by upper-caste domination. Fields represent both exploitation and means of subsistence because women's work in agriculture supports communities while being underappreciated.

In *The Grip of Change*, women are often regarded with suspicion when they step outside the confines of the home. If a young woman speaks up in public, she could be humiliated; if a widow goes by herself, she could be attacked for her character. These depictions demonstrate how Dalit women see mobility as a sin unto itself. However, Sivakami also illustrates how public assemblies can have a transforming effect. Through group speaking, women are able to retake the public domain through informal storytelling circles, gossip sessions, and collective lamentations. Despite being silenced in official institutions, their voices reverberate in these commonplace settings, generating counter-publics where different kinds of belonging arise.



## Political Spaces: Panchayats, Courts, and Male Leadership

Sivakami's criticism of political institutions including courts, panchayats, and leadership structures is among her most notable literary achievements. Despite being purportedly created to administer justice, these organisations frequently uphold patriarchal and casteist systems. *The Grip of Change's* court scene serves as a striking example of this. Thangam's matter is handled by men like Kathamuthu rather than by her own voice. For her, the legal system becomes less about justice and more about strengthening masculine authority. Ironically, Dalit men duplicate similar exclusionary behaviours within their own communities by suppressing women, despite being excluded from upper-caste hegemonies.

The panchayat is also portrayed as a male-dominated setting where decisions are made without the involvement of women but in the name of the community. Through these depictions, Sivakami challenges the way men control political space, causing women to be marginalised on two levels: first by caste, and subsequently by gender. Crucially, Sivakami presents her story as a different kind of political arena. She emphasises how storytelling serves as a parallel court, documenting injustice and providing recognition where institutions fail, by providing Thangam and other women with a voice in fiction.

## Spatial Resistance: Reclaiming Restrictive Geographies

In spite of these geographical limitations, Sivakami highlights the tenacity of women. Acts of resistance are used on a regular basis to navigate domestic, public, and political settings, which are not static. Women exercise their right to dignity and publicly challenge men's dominance in the house. Their meetings in the streets foster solidarity that fights loneliness. Through literature itself, their suppressed experiences are re-inscribed in political settings. The demand of marginalized groups to change areas for their own purposes, which Lefebvre refers to as the "right to the city," is reflected in this negotiation. According to Sivakami, the survival tactics of Dalit women show that despite oppression, space is never completely blocked.

## Conclusion

The works of P. Sivakami demonstrate that the fight for justice is a fight for space as well. Caste and patriarchal hierarchies are imprinted in homes, streets, and political institutions, which are not neutral spaces but rather structures of power. But Dalit women make space for agency, solidarity, and dissent in these oppressive regions.

Sivakami's novels elevate the politics of belonging, exclusion, and reclamation above victimhood narratives, as can be seen when interpreted through the lens of feminist geographies and Lefebvre's spatial theory. In doing so, Sivakami presents a vision of how Dalit women might rethink the very settings that imprison them, in addition to offering a critique of repressive hierarchies.

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