

Dialectics of Dalit Reterritorialization: A Study of Select Stories of Sridara Ganesan: *Meesai* (Moustache)

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Abstract

Sridara Ganesan is a Dalit writer and his contribution to Tamil Dalit Writing is noteworthy. The present researcher has taken two stories from *Meesai* (Moustache). The story, “Ammavin Purusargal” (Mother’s Husbands) deals with a question of a young Dalit woman’s identity crisis about her birth. It highlights the uniqueness of Dalit motherhood and Dalit womanhood in the society. It also shows the hurdles in Dalit families for their growth and development in the society against the mainstream. The story, “Sakkilitchi” (An Arunthathi Woman) is a threat to upper caste men who exercise sexual violence against Dalit women. It also questions the upper castes’ belief in casteism and their sexuality against Dalit women in the society. It also undermines the upper castes’ casteist behaviour in abusing and oppressing the Dalits in the society. It also attempts to dismantle the upper castes’ strong notion and belief in caste system. It critically tries to find out the root cause of Dalits’ de-territorialization in the society. The paper, “Dialectics of Dalit Re-territorialization: A Study of the Select Stories of Sridara Ganesan’s *Meesai*” purports to analyze the ways and methods of Dalit re-territorialization in various aspects of their life against the mainstream society.

Keywords: Sridhara Ganesan, *Meesai*, Motherhood, Caste Identity, Casteism, De-territorialization, Re-territorialization

Sridara Ganesan is a prolific writer in Tamil Dalit Writing. He has contributed a number of novels and short stories to Tamil Dalit literature. His writing is always to liberate Dalits from the social clutches and to reclaim the denied human rights from the majority people and from the government. He discusses the pertinent Dalit issues such as Dalit identity, dignity and honour in the society. The story raises questions to the Tamil mainstream society on the basis of social structure and hierarchy in the society. It also lists the ways of behaviour and attitude of upper caste Hindus to oppress Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular. It also seeks solidarity from all the people in the society. As a whole, he attempts to show Dalit reterritorialization in their personal space, power, culture, dignity, honour, image, status, and caste identity. It also

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enables Dalits including women to live peacefully with the upper caste Hindus and with their men in the society.

Sridara Ganesan discusses the significance of Dalit women's redefinition and their reterritorialization in the story, Ammavin Purusargal (Mother's Husbands) and in the story, Sakkilichi (Arunthathi woman). He develops the theme of Dalit woman's reterritorialization by unfolding their unique way of settling the problems against the Hindu caste people in the society. The issue in the story, Ammavin Purusargal (Mother's Husbands) revolves around a young educated Dalit woman and a Dalit mother in the society. Both the mother and the daughter try to reterritorialize peacefully with a remarkable status in the society. The problem of the respected Dalit mother in the story is to settle her daughter peacefully in her life whereas the problem of the daughter is to create an ideal world of her own in the society.

The main theme of the story is built in their relationships with the members of the society. The problem comes to the daughter's ears in the schools about the scandals of her mother's affairs in the society. She wishes to discover the wrongness in her mother's lonely life. Besides that, her close relatives and her well-wishers affectionately tell her, "Ungaammaiyai mathiri irukkathemma Rajathi mathiri iru. Yarayum nambi mosam pogathe" (Ammavin Purusargal, 67). Don't be like your mother. Be as a Rajathi. Don't be deceived on trusting anyone.

It has psychologically forced her to familiarize the people around her in the society. She is ready to take up the practical obstacles for searching her true father without any intimation to her mother. She comes to know from an old Dalit man that she has had three husbands. She has heard that she cannot cope up with anyone in her life. The first husband is a drunkard, second, mentally sick person and the third one is the contractor. Moreover, the old man assures her that he is her father and he has stated that one day he will take her to her father. The present researcher investigates the life of Dalit mother with her husbands.

The first husband is a drunkard who always beat her black and blue. One day, he drank a substance of insecticide and died on account of his failure in life. The second has become mentally ill and later on he died. The writer notes about the death of the man due to the cheating of his other caste friend in his business. After that, she was befriended by the contractor Naickkar (upper caste man) in the workplace. He begins to roam around her, and he has kept her in a separate house despite his earlier marriage and his children. One day he quarrelled with her stating that she was keeping another man in her life. She gets angry and tears the photo taken together as a symbol of marriage. Then, he has gone. The contractor (Naickkar) keeps her for his sexual fulfillment will not show Dalit woman in the society as his wife. But she wants him to give a peaceful life by marrying her. Moreover, he has purposefully said to her that she keeps another man because he wants to leave her permanently. This is one of the tricks by man against women in the society.

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Finally, she determines that she can lead her life alone in the society. Dalit women do not care for widowhood, but the upper caste Brahmin widows wear white saree and are immersed in chanting Gayathiri mantra, etc. in the locked dark room. According to writer Sridara Ganesan, the name of the father (Head of the family) is missing in many family ration-cards of Tamil Nadu. But the society abuses the deserted Dalit woman on the assumption that they may have illicit affairs and they address them as 'Prostitutes' in the society. Everyone (including the upper caste) should know that it is not the fault of Dalit woman, but it is the social predicament of Dalit women in the society.

Sridara Ganesan presents Dalit re-territorialization on exposing the identity of a Dalit young woman. She is the daughter of Naickka and Paraiya woman. An old Dalit narrates the whole thing to the Dalit young woman about her father and mother. He states that the father is a rich man and runs a big tea stall in Tuticorin town. He is not surprised to see her daughter. He does not show any emotional bond towards her and he is not serious and does not even express any concern and care for his daughter. But she is overwhelmed to meet her father. Sridara Ganesan writes; "Athilum raththa uravu konda oruvarai, appa ennudaiya appa, engappa enru sollakudiyavarai enrellam ninaikaile avalathu manam kuthuugalam kondathu" (Ammavin Purusargal, 71). She is excited to meet her own father to see, to talk, and she can announce that he is her father. But rather he tells her, "Oh! Neethana athu?" (Ammavin Purusargal, 72). Are you the one? On hearing the words, she is dumbfounded, and she has become silent and does not wish to talk anything to him and she wishes to move quickly. Then, he asks the boy (worker) to keep a stool for her to sit there. He states, "Ongamma oru Parachi, Parachi puthiyai ketkathe. Nan theriyathanama irunththiten. Enna irunthalum, 'nee oru Naickkatchi' yaar ketalum em peyarai cholli, 'Naickkar magalunnu cholli'" (Ammavin Purusargal, 73). Your mother is a Paraiya woman. Don't listen to the advice of Paraiya woman. I was not aware of this. Despite that, you are a daughter of Naickka. Whoever asks you, tell my name. Tell them I am the daughter of Naickka. Listening to the words of Naickka, she has felt a gulp of fire in her stomach. She is averse to stand in front of him. The writer states, "Melum avalathu adivaitril neruppai vaithu chutta mathiri unarnthal" (Ammavin Purusargal, 73).

During the conversation, one woman of her age (his daughter) approaches him with her two children. She tells him that her husband loiters here and there and asks him to give any work for him in the tea stall. He agreed to that. Then she asks him who she is. He replied that she has come to ask for a job for his brother in our stall. She is frozen on hearing the words of the Naickka man (father). She does not wish to stand there and at the same time she wishes to give him a counter statement immediately. She replies, "Aamma ...aamma.... Nan oru Parachi mava, athilum puththi ketta Parachi mava, avalukku nalavathu oru purusanai kootikodunga. Aval ini oru pillaiyai peththu, enakku oru thambiyai kodukkattum, avana kondu vanthu, omma kadaiila velakki cherthu vidukiren ..." (Ammavin Purusargal, 74). Yes... yes.... I am the daughter of Paraiya and senseless Parachi's daughter. Give her a fourth husband, afterwards, she will give me a brother by

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begetting. Then, I will disown him as a servant in your shop. Then, she has moved from there. She does not want the identity of the man who has fathered her but rather she wishes to be a Dalit woman in the society. Hence, the daughter reterritorializes her identity in the society.

Sridhara Ganesan also discusses re-territorialization of Dalit woman in the story, Sakkilichi. The Dalit woman who appears in the story re-territorializes her identity by escaping the sexual threat by the Upper caste man in the story, Sakkilichi. The word, Sakkilichi is used to abuse the low caste woman. She works for a Naickkar man with her husband. The Naickkar lives alone in his bungalow. He has many acres of land. He employs many servants in his land and in his house. One day he invites the Arunthathi woman for giving him sexual company for a night. The Naickkar also promises that he will give her money and Jewells. On hearing the words from him, she has been upset. She does not know what to do and how to react to the situation. She cannot obey the Naickkar man because she and her husband work together for a long time and at the same time, she needs to protect herself from the particular action. She is mentally worried. Finally, she decides to go to Master's bungalow. On seeing her, the Naickkar is excited and started glorifying her beauty. She assures him that she will give him sexual company for the night. She asks him to remove his shirt. Finally, she has taken the castration rod and she has crushed his reproductive organ. Then, she escapes from the house. Sridhara Ganesan has created the Dalit woman courageously in the story. She has broken the stereotypes of Dalit womanhood. Hence, the Dalit woman re-territorializes her dignity and honour.

Sridhara Ganesan develops the Dalits' day today situation for Dalits' re-territorialization in the society. He has used the situation of Castrating pigs in the story. Castration of male pigs is quite common in breeding pigs. Dalit people are good at breeding pigs in their houses. Castration of male pigs is done because for increasing the weight of pigs. Sridhara Ganesan uses this situation in the story, Sakkilichi. The Dalit woman, having reached her home finds that her father in law takes Castration rods and he has crushed the reproductive organ of the male pig. Sridhara Ganesan reflects the day today situation of Dalits' life in the story, Sakkilichi. The Dalit woman then realizes the significance of using the castration rod for tackling the Naickkar in the house. Sridhara Ganesan writes, "Avarathu kilattu aan kuriil athai vaithu, orae amukku. Avvalavuthan, Naikkararadamirunthu Aaa innu sathan vanthathu. Athuvum kooda theruvil thirigira oru pottai naikkakka martra theru naiigal kulaikira saththathil edupadamale poirtru" (Sakkilichi, 105). Placing the Castration rod on his reproductive organ, give only one crush. He moans loudly. It is not audible in the cry of street male dogs. Sridhara Ganesan hence differs from other mainstream writers on using Dalits' life uniquely in the story. The upper caste people have a strong notion that Dalit people are dirty, and they live in slums. They breed pigs for their livelihood. Pigs are also dirty in nature. The upper caste people despise Dalits and Pigs. Hence, Sridhara Ganesan has successfully turned the Dalits' situation to reterritorialize Dalits' identity and honour in the society.

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Sridara Ganesan also underlines Dalit woman sensibility in the story, *Ammavin Purusargal* (Mother's husbands). Dalit woman sensibility is to capture the unique problems and the unique sensibility of Dalit women in the work of art. Dalit woman's sensibility lies in the title of the stories, the attitude of Dalit mother and the daughter and the emotional outburst of Dalit woman against the sexual threat. The title *Ammavin Purusargal* (Mother's Husbands) itself is drawn from Dalit's life. It is different from the titles of Tamil mainstream writings in Tamil Nadu. The writer is not at all ashamed on giving this title because the title is appropriate to Dalit woman. Moreover, the title is unique in expressing the problem of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. The upper caste people never openly state the number of husbands for a woman.

Sridhara Ganesan's second story, *Sakkilichi* (Arunthathi woman) directly uses the name of a low Caste in the society. It is a bold attempt to name the story like this. The story seriously criticizes the people who make fun of Arunthathiyars in the society. At first, the present researcher underlines the attitude of the mother from the story. The respected Dalit mother always wishes her daughter's settlement. She never opens her mouth about her past life to her daughter, but she states, "Kadantha kaalathai partri pesathe. Ippa ullathai partri pesu, ippa ulla nillamaikalai partri pesu. Nallaikku nee sonthakkalkalla nikkanum. Appadi nippiya?" (*Ammavin Purusargal*, 68). Don't speak about the past. Speak about the present. Speak about the present situation. You must stand on your own legs. Will you? These words do not come from her mouth, but this is an outcome of her bitter experience in her life. She knows how to lead life in the caste discriminated society. She has the responsibility to guide her daughter in the proper direction.

The writer states that the daughter has never seen her mother tired of her life and she always keeps her face smiling. She does not have wickedness in her mind, and she does not even scold anyone in the society. She does even love the street dogs and cats. She always helps the old folks in her street. Sridara Ganesan says, "Evvalavu peria kastathilum nilai kulaiyamattal. Thaangi kolval. Ammavin siriththa mugam maraathu. Ivvalavu nalla ammavukku oru ketta gunam undu. Oru sudu sol thaanga mattal. Antha illappai siramathudan sari seithu kolval. Ammavukku aaruthal solla vendiyathillai. Aval valainthulum thannai nimirthikollum thairiyam avalukku undu" (*Ammavin Purusargal*, 69-70). The mother will stand up whatever the difficulties she encounters. She endures it. She won't change her face. She has a bad habit of tolerating reproachful words. She gets adjusted to all these in her life. No need to tell her a word of consolation. She has the courage to rectify her mistake in her life. The attitude of the mother is expressed through a woman (who wishes to ask the Dalit mother to give her daughter in marriage with his son) visiting the family. The old man utters, "Periyavare athai sonar. Oru nal avar, salai vipathil adipattukidakkum pothu yarr enru theriyatha amma , oru auto pidiththu, avarai thookki vaithu, aaspathiriil serththu , uyirai kappatriya sambavam atthanaiyum vivariththar" (*Ammavin Purusargal*, 75). The old man

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said that he had met an accident. Her mother hired an auto and admitted him in the hospital and saved him without knowing his name. Finally, she settles her daughter in marriage with the good family. Hence, she re-territorializes her identity in the society.

Sridhara Ganesan also captures Dalit woman's sensibility very seriously in the story, Sakkilichi. The Dalit woman who appears in the story is very bold. She belongs to an Arunthathi caste. She is worried about the invitation of the old Naickkar for sexual company in his house. She has left the Naickkar's house without informing her husband. She cannot do anything in her home. She does not know what to do in the situation. She does not know if she has to convey the problem to her husband or not. She is perplexed in the situation. The writer writes; "Avalathu mugam surungi kidakku. Ippadi kettutane. Enna saiya? Yarukkittap poi solla? nnu ore kavalai" (Sakkilichi, 99). Her face has been wrinkled. He has asked such a thing. What to do? She is worried to whom to address this issue. She retrospectively thinks back and states, "Konjam kalara, alaga, lathanama irunthal kilavan kooda vidamattukkan? Udane vaannu kooppidukiran. Ithai mathiri Naickkatchiyai poi kooppida mudiyuma? Sakkilichinna avvalavu illakaramava potchu?" (Sakkilichi, 101). The old man does not even leave a pretty, beautiful and good structured woman. He has called her immediately. Can he invite a Naickkar woman to his bed? Is it easier to sleep with Sakkilichi? Finally, she has decided to be chaste and at the same time she has to cheat him at the high time. Then, she devised to act carefully to re-territorialize her dignity and honour in her family and in the society.

The present researcher feels that the polished habits, the civilized self-culture and the manners of the respected Dalit woman cannot be practiced in one generation but she has evolved her character from the enslavement of her people for many centuries under mainstream people and she acts gently with others in the society. It can be inferred that the Dalit mother being aware about the politics of caste and gender discrimination, disposes herself as a new Dalit woman in the society. She appears as a self-cultured woman and she breaks away the stereotype of Dalit womanhood. She challenges the upper caste's values and culture by redefining her identity in the society.

The paper highlights the re-territorialization of Dalit women's caste identity and their cultural identity by discussing their virtual action in their encounters in their life.

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