

Care Injustice and Sustainable Development: Reading P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* through Joan Tronto's Political Ethics of Care

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In addition to being maintained through direct acts of violence, exclusion, and unequal resource access, caste and gender discrimination are maintained through unequal relations through which vulnerability is identified, responsibility is assigned, work is done, protection is provided, and decisions about well-being are made. In literature, P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* represents a pertinent literary example of these systems through the depiction of caste oppression, patriarchal control, labour, political activism, and the fight of Dalit women for agency. While existing research on the novel has explored it through such categories as caste, Dalit identity, patriarchy, body politics, resistance, and political change, the political organisation of care remains under-examined. Filling this gap, the present study focuses on the application of Joan Tronto's political ethics of care as applied to selected text situations in the novel. In order to complement the intersection of caste and gender, the concept of intersectionality is used as an additional theoretical approach in the study of their mutually reinforcing effects. Employing qualitative close reading, thematic analysis, and theoretical interpretation, the research proposes care injustice as an additional analytical category for the exploration of systematic inequalities in recognition, responsibility assignment, care labour, reception, and political participation. The analysis will show that Thangam's suffering becomes visible without guaranteeing equal control over the representation of it; protection can be an act that fights caste discrimination but maintains patriarchal control; economic dependency makes labour inseparable from vulnerability; and political actions of a community can be exclusive when excluding the affected person from decision-making processes. The study therefore suggests

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that care is politically ambivalent as it challenges domination but at the same time reproduces it. Connecting Tronto's theory of care ethics with Dalit feminism and intersectionality, the study presents a caste- and gender-sensitive analysis of care injustice and its applicability to sustainable social justice, in particular SDGs 5, 8, 10, and 16.

Keywords: Care Injustice; Dalit Literature; P. Sivakami; The Grip of Change; Joan Tronto; Ethics of Care; Intersectionality; Sustainable Development

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Caste is a historically grounded system of hierarchical stratification that manages status, labor, dignity, and social resource allocation. Dalit literature undermines this hierarchy by emphasizing feelings of exclusion, humiliation, violence, labor exploitation, and resistance (Ambedkar). Experiences of Dalit women need special consideration because caste and gender exist at the same time instead of operating separately. Thus, intersectionality becomes an important theoretical tool that explains how the vulnerability of Dalit women is created through the overlapping oppression of caste and patriarchy (Crenshaw; Pan 7–17).

The novel *The Grip of Change* by P. Sivakami is important in this respect because it illustrates the life of Thangam, a Dalit woman who is vulnerable due to her experience with caste hierarchy, patriarchy, community connections, and political intervention (Sivakami). There have been many studies focused on the novel using such concepts as caste, Dalit feminism, body politics, patriarchy, resistance, and women's agency (Ghosh; Pan; Simon). The significance of the work was thus established through existing critical approaches.

In continuation of previous scholarship, this paper analyzes the novel paying more attention to the political organization of care. According to Joan Tronto, care is a political practice that includes recognition of needs, responsibility, labor, reception, and democratic participation (Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference"; Moral

Boundaries). This theoretical framework gives an opportunity not only to ask about the person who suffers in *The Grip of Change*, but also who recognizes his/her suffering, takes responsibility for it, does care labor, gets care, and participates in its decision-making.

Thus, care injustice becomes another important concept which can be used in combination with the theory of intersectionality to identify inequalities in the recognition, distribution, performance, reception, and organization of care. The concept combines Dalit feminist literary criticism and the issues of sustainable development, specifically gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, well-being, and accountable institutions (United Nations). The *Grip of Change* becomes an example of literary analysis of care injustices.

1.2 Ethics, Care, and Sustainable Development

This aspect of sustainability has a useful connection with the political ethics of care. In her important work, Joan C. Tronto redefines care from the private realm to a political and social activity instead of an individual virtue (Tronto 644–63). (Experts@Minnesota) Care consists of the issues of need, responsibility, labor, power, and social organization. This view becomes particularly appropriate in the context of a literary text in which caste and gender define the vulnerable group, the party responsible for this vulnerability, the type of labor and voice.

The ethical aspect of care thus goes beyond the issue of whether the characters have compassion towards each other. The key point is whether the

care has been distributed equally. Social organization can include protective or helping actions but at the same time lead to an unequal distribution of care duties and a lack of power in marginalized people's decision-making. Care may be also paternalistic when the person on the receiving end lacks power to identify his or her needs and act upon them. Thus, the analysis of care should take into consideration both power and compassion.

Care injustice is the name suggested in this article to denote this kind of inequality. Care injustice is defined as systematic inequality involving unequal recognition of needs, unequal responsibility, unequal burden of care, devaluation of care labor, denial of agency in receiving care, and lack of representation in care organizing institutions. This concept does not substitute such terms as oppression, structural violence, exclusion, or intersectionality; it rather shows how these structures work in the relations of care.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Gap

Scholarship on *The Grip of Change* has established the importance of caste, patriarchy, body politics, Dalit women's identity, resistance, agency, and political transformation. Ghosh demonstrates how disciplinary power operates through the regulation of Dalit women's bodies and behaviour, while Pan examines the intersectional construction of the Dalit woman. Simon emphasizes the movement from literary representation toward political activism, and recent studies continue to examine gender, resilience, discrimination, political transformation, and masculine power in Sivakami's writing (Ghosh; Pan 7–17; Simon 109–22; Mohanty and Babu; Maharaj; Chandramani and Padhi; Roy and Choudhury).

These studies are indispensable to the present argument, but the scholarship considered here has not developed **the organization of care as a sustained analytical problem** in *The Grip of Change*. Existing approaches explain who is oppressed, how patriarchal and caste power

operate, how women's bodies become sites of political struggle, and how resistance emerges. They do not, however, sufficiently explain how these structures determine who recognizes suffering, who assumes responsibility for addressing it, who performs care labour, whether the recipient can negotiate or refuse care, and who participates in decisions concerning care.

The gap is therefore not an absence of scholarship on gender or caste. Rather, it is a gap in the **political analysis of care within caste- and gender-stratified relations**. Tronto's political ethics provides a vocabulary for examining need, responsibility, labour, institutional power, and democratic participation, while intersectionality explains how caste and gender jointly structure vulnerability (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*; *Caring Democracy*; Crenshaw). Bringing these perspectives into dialogue makes it possible to identify an additional dimension of inequality: inequality in the organization of care.

The present study addresses this gap through the concept of **care injustice**. It argues that care becomes unjust when the same social structures that produce vulnerability also determine whose needs are recognized, who is expected to respond, whose labour sustains others, whether recipients retain agency, and whether marginalized subjects participate in decisions concerning their own well-being.

This study therefore moves the discussion from **representation of oppression** toward the **political organization of responses to vulnerability**. It asks not only who suffers, but also who is permitted to define the appropriate response to that suffering. In doing so, it contributes to Dalit feminist literary criticism while also opening a connection between literary studies, political care ethics, and sustainable social justice

2. Literature Review

2.1 Scholarship on *The Grip of Change*

Scholarship on P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* has established the novel as an important site for

examining the intersections of caste, gender, patriarchy, and political agency. A central concern in this scholarship is the representation of Dalit women not merely as victims of caste oppression but as subjects negotiating multiple and sometimes conflicting structures of power. This distinction is important because the novel does not construct caste oppression as a problem existing only outside the Dalit community. It also interrogates patriarchal authority within the community, thereby complicating any interpretation that treats caste identity as producing a politically unified subject (Sivakami).

Dalit feminist approaches are particularly relevant to this complexity. Pan argues that the category of the Dalit woman emerges through the interaction of caste and gender rather than through either category independently (7–17). This perspective provides an important foundation for reading Sivakami's representation of Thangam and other women because their vulnerability is simultaneously caste-marked and gendered. The novel's critique therefore operates at two levels: it exposes the violence and exclusion produced by caste hierarchy while also questioning patriarchal practices within Dalit social and political structures.

Ghosh's Foucauldian analysis further demonstrates that the female body in *The Grip of Change* becomes a site of disciplinary power. His analysis shows how caste and patriarchy operate through practices regulating women's bodies, sexuality, behaviour, and social position (Ghosh). This approach is valuable because it shifts attention from overt violence to the everyday mechanisms through which power becomes normalized. However, a focus on discipline does not fully explain how social actors respond to vulnerability or how responsibility for addressing suffering is distributed. The question of care consequently provides an additional analytical dimension.

Scholarship also emphasizes resistance and political transformation. Simon reads selected Dalit women's narratives, including Sivakami's

work, through a movement from aesthetic representation toward activism, suggesting that Dalit women's writing can function as a form of social and political intervention (Simon 109–22). Such an approach is significant for understanding the novel's concern with consciousness and change. Similarly, recent scholarship continues to explore gender, identity, resilience, discrimination, and political transformation in Sivakami's fiction (Mohanty and Babu; Chandramani and Padhi; Roy and Choudhury). These studies collectively establish that *The Grip of Change* is concerned not only with oppression but also with the possibility and limitations of social transformation.

Recent feminist scholarship further demonstrates the continuing relevance of Sivakami's work for understanding gendered power. Maharaj's examination of masculine anxieties and female homosociality in Sivakami's novels, for example, directs attention to the relationships among masculinity, femininity, and social power (Maharaj). Such scholarship strengthens the case for examining the relational dimensions of the novel. Nevertheless, the category of care remains analytically underdeveloped. Existing approaches identify who is oppressed, how power operates, and how resistance emerges; the present study asks how social structures also determine **who must care, who receives care, whose needs are recognized, and whose care labour remains invisible**.

2.2 Ethics of Care in Literary and Political Thought

The ethics of care emerged partly as a challenge to moral theories that privilege abstract principles, autonomous individuals, and universal rules while underemphasizing relationships, dependency, vulnerability, and contextual responsibility. Carol Gilligan's work was foundational in drawing attention to different modes of moral reasoning and to the significance of relational concerns. Nel Noddings subsequently developed a relational conception of caring grounded in attentiveness and

responsiveness. Virginia Held expanded the discussion by emphasizing that care has implications beyond personal relationships and belongs within political and social theory (Held).

Joan Tronto's contribution is particularly important for the present study because she politicizes care. In "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care," Tronto challenges the confinement of care to the feminine or private sphere and argues for a broader understanding of care that takes power and social structures seriously (644–63). Her *Moral Boundaries* further develops care as a political practice involving the organization of social life, responsibility, and unequal power (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*). Daniel Engster similarly connects care ethics with political theory and justice, emphasizing the institutional conditions required for human flourishing (Engster).

Tronto's later work develops this political orientation further by considering institutions and democratic organization. In "Creating Caring Institutions," she argues that institutions themselves must be examined according to how they organize care, responsibility, and political participation (158–71). *Caring Democracy* extends this argument by connecting care to democratic equality and justice (Tronto, *Caring Democracy*). The significance of this approach for literary analysis is that care need not be reduced to kindness between individual characters. A literary text can instead be examined for the social arrangements through which needs become visible, responsibilities are assigned, labour is performed, and institutions respond.

This political conception of care is particularly appropriate for *The Grip of Change*. The novel's conflicts involve not only interpersonal relationships but also family authority, caste structures, community leadership, labour, violence, and institutional intervention. Care therefore becomes a question of political organization. The relevant analytical issue is not

simply whether a character behaves compassionately but whether the social structure distributes care-related responsibilities equitably.

2.3 Sustainability, SDGs, and Literary Criticism

Sustainability studies increasingly recognizes that development cannot be separated from questions of inequality, labour, well-being, and institutional justice. The United Nations 2030 Agenda describes the Sustainable Development Goals as integrated and indivisible and places social inclusion, gender equality, reduced inequality, and peaceful and accountable institutions within the wider project of sustainable development (United Nations). SDG 5.4 is particularly relevant because it recognizes unpaid care and domestic work as an important dimension of gender equality (United Nations).

This creates an important connection between care ethics and sustainability. Kabeer identifies the structural asymmetry between unpaid care work and the market economy, demonstrating how care responsibilities can remain unequally distributed and economically undervalued (702–17). Ilkkaracan's discussion of the care economy similarly emphasizes the need for transformative approaches to care policy rather than treating care as a private household matter (954–73). Such work demonstrates that care is not peripheral to development; it is part of the infrastructure through which social and economic life is reproduced.

Literary criticism can contribute to this discussion by examining how narratives make otherwise normalized inequalities visible. Literature does not measure SDG achievement, but it can expose the lived conditions behind abstract categories such as inequality, gender equality, labour, well-being, and institutional justice. In this sense, *The Grip of Change* can be read as a cultural text through which the social organization of vulnerability and care becomes critically legible.

Table 1. Literature Review Synthesis

Scholarly Debate	Major Focus	Key Scholarship	What It Establishes	What Remains Underexplored
Dalit literature and feminism	Caste, patriarchy, resistance, identity, women's agency	Sivakami; Pan; Ghosh; Simon	<i>The Grip of Change</i> exposes the intersection of caste and gender	The organization and distribution of care
Intersectionality	Interacting structures of oppression	Crenshaw	Caste/gender experiences cannot be examined separately	Intersectionality has rarely been connected to political care relations in this text
Ethics of care	Dependency, responsibility, care labour, political power	Gilligan; Noddings; Tronto; Held; Engster	Care is a moral and political practice rather than merely private work	Limited application to Dalit literary representation
Political ethics of care	Responsibility, institutions, democracy, collective care	Tronto	Care is structured by power and institutions	Caste as a major structuring condition of care requires further examination
Care economy	Unpaid care, gendered labour, social reproduction	Kabeer; Ilkharacan	Care labour is economically and socially unequal	Literary representation of caste-marked care labour remains underexamined
Sustainability studies	Equality, well-being, labour, institutions	UN SDGs; sustainability scholarship	Sustainable development includes social and institutional justice	SDGs are rarely interpreted through literary ethics of care
Literary sustainability studies	Literature and social/environmental futures	Environmental humanities and SDG criticism	Literature can critique dominant models of development	Care injustice as a bridge between literature and SDG discourse

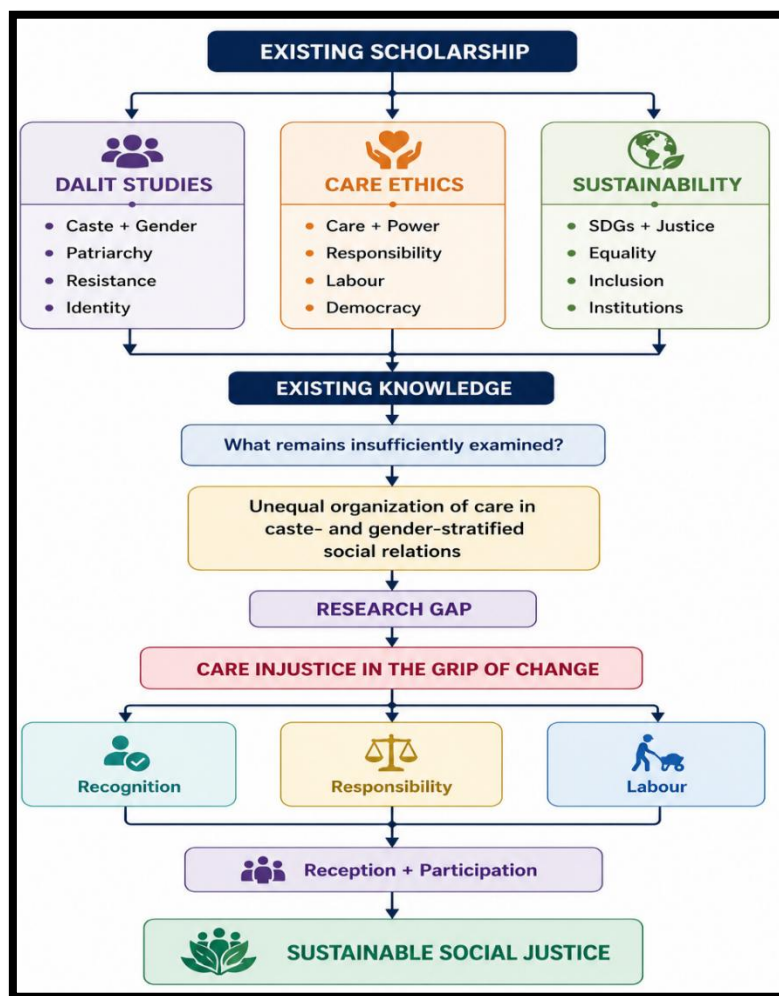


Figure 1. Research Framework: From Existing Scholarship to Sustainable Social Justice

2.4

Research Gap

The literature reviewed above establishes three important points. First, scholarship on *The Grip of Change* has extensively examined caste, gender, patriarchy, body politics, resistance, and political agency. Second, care-ethics scholarship has developed a substantial political vocabulary for examining need, responsibility, labour, institutions, and democratic participation (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*; Tronto, *Caring Democracy*). Third, contemporary sustainability discourse recognizes inequality, unpaid care, gender equality, and institutional justice as integral to development (United Nations).

What remains insufficiently developed is the intersection of these three fields. Specifically, existing scholarship considered here does not provide a systematic account of how caste and gender shape the organization of care in *The Grip of Change*. This study addresses that gap by bringing Tronto's political ethics of care into dialogue with Dalit feminist and intersectional literary criticism and by proposing **care injustice** as a focused concept for identifying unequal recognition, responsibility, care labour, care reception, and democratic participation. The study consequently extends the interpretation of the novel from the representation of oppression toward the political organization of the everyday

conditions through which vulnerable lives are sustained.

Table 2. Research Gap Matrix

Existing Research	Established Insight	Limitation	Present Study's Intervention
Dalit feminist readings	Caste and patriarchy intersect	Care is not the central analytical category	Reads caste/gender through care
Studies of <i>The Grip of Change</i>	Resistance, body politics, identity, gender	Limited attention to political care	Examines care relations in the novel
Tronto's care ethics	Care involves power, responsibility, labour, democracy	Limited engagement with Dalit literature	Applies Tronto to Dalit literary context
Intersectionality	Multiple structures shape vulnerability	Does not by itself explain organization of care	Connects intersectionality with care
Care-economy research	Unpaid care is unequally distributed	Primarily socio-economic/policy oriented	Reads care labour through literature
SDG scholarship	Equality, inclusion, labour, justice are sustainability concerns	Literature is not always central	Uses literature to reveal ethical dimensions of SDGs

3. Research Objectives, Research Questions, and Statement of Argument

3.1 Research Objectives

This study has five objectives:

1. **To examine** how caste and gender shape the recognition of vulnerability and the organization of care in P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*.
2. **To apply** Joan Tronto's political ethics of care—caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care receiving, and caring with—to selected textual situations in the novel.
3. **To conceptualize care injustice** as a complementary analytical category for identifying inequalities in recognition, responsibility, care labour, reception, and democratic participation.
4. **To examine the intersection of caste and gender** in determining who provides care, who

receives care, whose labour is valued, and whose agency is respected.

5. **To interpret the wider implications** of these care relations for socially sustainable justice, particularly in relation to SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10, and 16 (United Nations).

3.2 Research Questions

The study addresses four research questions:

1. **How does *The Grip of Change* represent the unequal recognition of needs and suffering within caste- and gender-hierarchical relations?**
2. **How do Tronto's phases of care illuminate the distribution of responsibility and care labour represented in the novel?**
3. **What forms of care injustice emerge from the interaction of caste, gender, labour,**

vulnerability, and institutional power in the text?

4. **How does the novel's representation of care injustice contribute to a broader understanding of social sustainability and the normative concerns represented by selected SDGs?**

These questions maintain a clear distinction between the literary evidence and the theoretical interpretation. The study does not assume beforehand that every instance of suffering in the novel constitutes care injustice. Instead, it identifies relevant textual situations and determines whether they demonstrate systematic inequalities in recognition, responsibility, labour, reception, or democratic participation.

3.3 Statement of Argument

The present paper suggests that *The Grip of Change* not only conceptualizes caste patriarchy as an institution that reproduces inequalities in status, power, and social recognition but also portrays the way care is organized unevenly under the caste patriarchal order. The novel illustrates that vulnerability cannot necessarily ensure ethical recognition and equitable protection. On the contrary, caste and gender affect whose suffering becomes visible, who is responsible for the response to such suffering, who undertakes the work necessary to take care of others, whose understanding of care gets acknowledged, and who is allowed to take part in the discussion of care. Tronto's political ethics makes the above-mentioned processes explicit in relation to caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care receiving, and caring with (Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference"; *Moral Boundaries*; *Caring Democracy*). This paper thus proposes care injustice to refer to such inequalities in the organization of care. Its main claim is that care can resist one form of oppression while reproducing another one: protection may oppose caste oppression but reproduce patriarchal domination; recognition may raise awareness of suffering but not necessarily of the agency; collective action may provide help but not

necessarily allow the person being assisted to participate in decision-making. The role of intersectionality is to explain how both caste and gender lead to the formation of the above-mentioned unequal positions, whereas Tronto's political ethics clarifies how these inequalities are reproduced in care relationships (Crenshaw; Pan 7–17).

4. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

4.1 Joan Tronto's Political Ethics of Care

The principal theoretical framework of this study is Joan C. Tronto's political ethics of care. Tronto's intervention is significant because it challenges the tendency to associate care exclusively with private relationships, feminine morality, or domestic responsibility. In "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care," she argues for understanding care as a broader social practice that involves questions of need, responsibility, labour, and power (Tronto 644–63). Her later work develops this position into a political theory in which the organization of care becomes a question of justice and democracy (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*; Tronto, *Caring Democracy*).

For the present study, Tronto's framework is useful because *The Grip of Change* represents vulnerability within a social environment structured by caste and gender. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether characters demonstrate compassion. Rather, the analysis asks how social relations determine who recognizes a need, who assumes responsibility for addressing it, who performs the required labour, how the recipient responds, and whether care becomes part of a democratic social arrangement.

Tronto identifies four interconnected phases of care in her earlier formulation. The first, **caring about**, involves recognizing that a need exists and paying attention to it. Recognition is therefore the beginning of a care process rather than a secondary moral gesture (Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference" 644–63). In a caste-stratified society, however, recognition itself can be

unequal. Some forms of suffering may receive immediate moral and institutional attention, while the suffering of marginalized subjects may be normalized or ignored. This makes recognition a political question.

The second phase, **taking care of**, concerns assuming responsibility for responding to an identified need. Tronto's distinction between recognizing a need and taking responsibility for it is important because social systems may acknowledge suffering without accepting an obligation to address it (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*). In *The Grip of Change*, this distinction allows the study to examine the roles of family, community leaders, and institutions without assuming that responsibility is equally distributed among them.

The third phase, **caregiving**, concerns the actual work required to meet a need. Care therefore has a material dimension. It can involve physical effort, emotional labour, domestic work, protection, and other forms of often undervalued activity. Tronto's political approach makes it possible to ask who performs this work and under what conditions (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*). This is particularly significant for a Dalit feminist reading because caste and gender may influence

both the type of labour assigned to women and the social value attached to that labour.

The fourth phase, **care receiving**, directs attention to the response of the person or group receiving care. Care cannot be considered successful merely because a provider believes that an appropriate action has been taken. The response of the recipient matters because needs are relational and can be misunderstood, imposed upon, or answered in ways that deny agency (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*). This phase is particularly useful for distinguishing genuine care from paternalistic forms of intervention.

Tronto's later work adds a fifth dimension, **caring with**, which places care within democratic relationships characterized by trust, solidarity, plurality, and shared responsibility (Tronto, *Caring Democracy*). This later formulation is important for the present study because it moves the discussion from individual acts of care toward the question of how societies can organize care collectively and democratically. It also prevents the analysis from ending with a simple identification of care failure. The larger issue becomes whether alternative social arrangements can distribute care more equitably.

Table 3. Tronto's Care Framework and Its Application

Care dimension	Central question	Analytical concern in <i>The Grip of Change</i>
Caring about	Whose need is recognized?	Visibility of marginalized suffering
Taking care of	Who assumes responsibility?	Family, community, and institutional responsibility
Caregiving	Who performs the work?	Gendered and caste-marked labour
Care receiving	How does the recipient respond?	Agency, recognition, and possible coercion
Caring with	How is care collectively organized?	Democratic participation and solidarity

4.2 Conceptualizing Care Injustice

The first key conceptual contribution of this research lies in the formulation of care injustice based on a conversation between Tronto's

political ethics of care and intersectionality as well as Dalit feminism. Intersectionality helps to explain the way in which intersecting power structures create different vulnerability

structures, and Tronto demonstrates the ways in which care is structured in terms of need, responsibility, labour, authority, and political participation (Crenshaw; Tronto, Moral Boundaries).

In this research, care injustice will be defined as a structural inequality in recognition of needs, allocation of responsibility, performance and evaluation of care labour, reception of care, and democratic participation in the organization of care. Care injustice is a more narrow term than oppression, structural violence, recognition, exclusion, or intersectionality: intersectionality explains vulnerability structures; Tronto explains care structure; care injustice identifies unequal consequences of this structure.

There are five interrelated types of care injustice:

1. Recognition injustice is the problem of ignoring, minimizing, delegitimizing marginalized needs and suffering. It is related to Tronto's "caring about" and involves the question of whose vulnerability is recognized.
2. Responsibility injustice is the issue of hierarchically structured responsibility for the response to need rather than equal responsibility. It concerns the issues of who intervenes, who has the right to interfere and who is responsible for the results.
3. Labour injustice is the problem of the unequal distribution of care labour among different people or its devaluation as social and economic practice. The division and the evaluation of care labour can be determined by the caste and/or gender identities of care providers (Kabeer 702–17; Ilkkaracan 954–73).
4. Reception injustice is the issue of the lack of agency of care recipients regarding their assessment, negotiation, modification, and refusal of the care provided. This dimension makes the distinction between care and paternalistic protection possible.
5. Democratic care injustice is the exclusion of marginalized subjects from decisions about care organization. It is related to Tronto's "caring with" and implies collective responsibility,

democracy, plurality, and institutional accountability (Caring Democracy).

All these kinds of care injustice are relational – the failure in recognition of vulnerability can lead to the unequal allocation of responsibility; unequal responsibility leads to the unequal distribution of labour; paternalistic care limits the participation of marginalized subjects.

It becomes especially pertinent to *The Grip of Change* because there are many cases when protection and control often occur in tandem. As far as *The Grip of Change* is concerned, it makes one wonder whether it is possible to recreate authority through political intervention in the situation when the person who needs protection is not in the same power position as the intervener to negotiate the terms of that protection (Sivakami). It means that the framework in question does not regard all representations of suffering as care injustice but considers the latter only when care is organized, distributed, received or decided upon by unequal structures.

4.3 Intersectionality as a Supportive Framework

The framework in question should be regarded as supportive rather than competitive. This is well proved by Crenshaw's formulation according to which women's experience of violence cannot be comprehended in terms of gender or race alone due to the emergence of unique types of vulnerability as a result of intersecting structures (89-106). In the case of the present study, caste and gender also intersect in creating the social context described in *The Grip of Change*.

This framework helps to avoid two reductionist approaches. One of them is the reduction of the novel to the problem of oppression experienced by members of the Dalit community without taking patriarchal relations into consideration. Another one is the reduction of the novel to a feminist text neglecting the significance of the issue of caste.

4.4 Sustainable Development Goals as a Normative Framework

Sustainable Development Goals are used in this study as a normative interpretive lens rather than thematic checklist. The United Nation's 2030 Agenda makes the link between sustainable development and equality, social inclusion, gender equality, decent work, well-being, and accountable institutions (United Nations). Issues raised by the Agenda resonate with the political ethics of care, since social existence relies on various types of work, responsibilities, protection, and institutional support which are not distributed evenly.

Five SDGs are specifically important here. SDG 3 deals with health and well-being issues; SDG 5 deals with gender equality and includes issues of unpaid care and domestic work; SDG 8 deals

with decent work and labor; SDG 10 tackles inequality and social inclusion; and SDG 16 deals with justice, good institutions, participation, and accountability (United Nations).

The Grip of Change cannot be said to anticipate or represent the SDGs in any way. What the study seeks to do is to interpret the novel with respect to the current normative issues as articulated by the SDGs. Literature will not help us to measure achievement of the SDGs, but may help to illuminate the social relations behind such abstract notions as inequality, labor, well-being, and institutional justice.

Analytical framework thus would look like:

Caste + Gender → Structured Vulnerability → Unequal Care Relations → Care Injustice → Sustainable Justice Implications

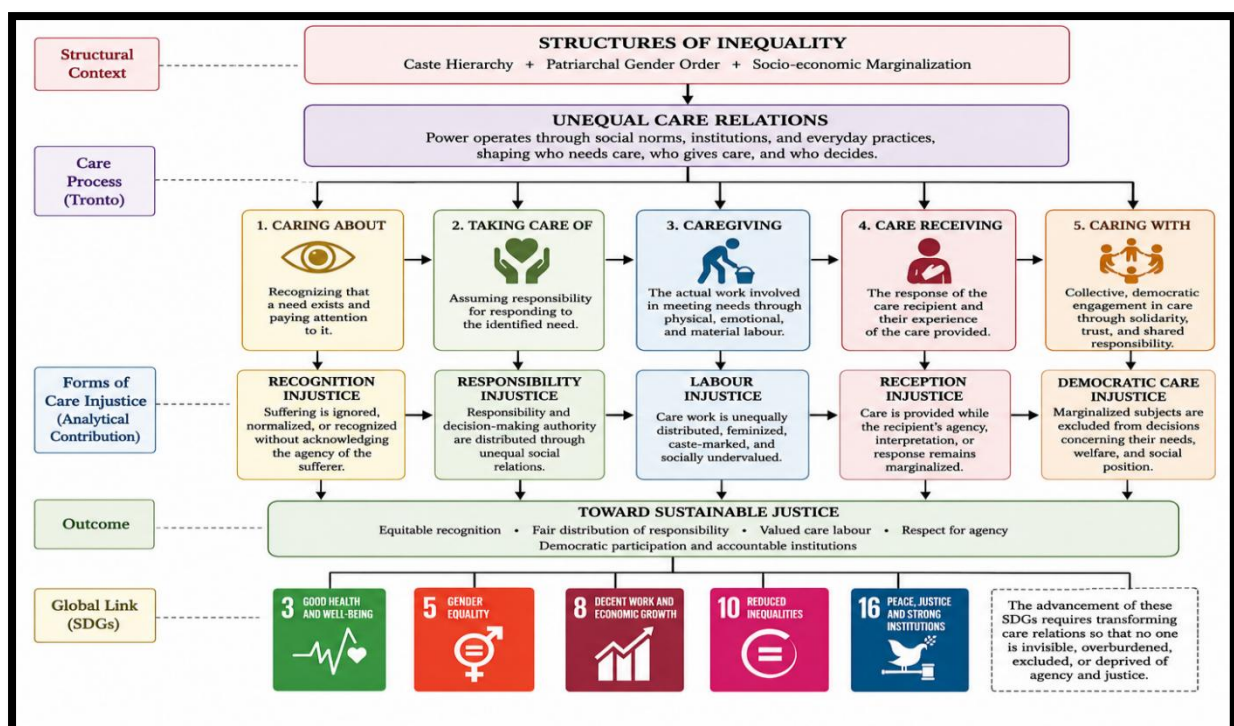


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Care Injustice in *The Grip of Change*

As illustrated in Figure 2, care injustice emerges through the interaction of caste and gender with the different dimensions of care, linking interpersonal relations to broader questions of sustainable justice.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive approach appropriate for literary and interdisciplinary studies. Instead of quantifying

instances of care, the study aims at examining how caste, gender, vulnerability, responsibility, work, agency, and institutional power relations are represented in the process of narration. Therefore, the literary text itself serves as the study's main data source, while theory provides interpretations of the relationships which can be found there.

The three complementary methods will be used in the study, namely close reading, thematic analysis, and theoretically-informed literary interpretation. The first technique includes the analysis of narrative language, characterization, dialogue, conflicts and significant events. The second method involves identification of recurrent themes related to vulnerability, recognition, responsibility, work, intervention, agency, and participation. The third phase involves placing the identified themes in the context of Tronto's political ethics of care, intersectionality, Dalit feminist criticism and relevant SDGs.

5.2 Text Selection

P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* is chosen for its focus on caste, gender, vulnerability, political intervention, community authority and agency of women. The significance of the novel for understanding caste, patriarchy, body politics, resistance and subjectivity of Dalit women is recognized in existing scholarly literature (Ghosh; Pan; Simon).

The 2006 English edition published by Orient Longman/Orient BlackSwan will be used in the study. Given that this edition is translated, all quotations from the primary text should be referenced as per the edition used in the study.

The Author's Notes are treated as supplementary texts insofar as they clarify Sivakami's reflections on representation and political responsibility.

5.3 Analytical Procedure

The process involves five steps.

Step 1: Text identification. Important scenes that portray vulnerability, need, violence, responsibility, protection, work, intervention, institutional response or agency are identified via close readings.

Step 2: Classification based on Tronto's theory. Each important scene is analysed in terms of caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care receiving, or caring with (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries; Caring Democracy*).

Step 3: Care-injustice analysis. This study analyses the inequality in recognition, responsibility, labour, reception or democratic participation of the scene under consideration.

Step 4: Intersectional analysis. This analysis focuses on the way in which caste and gender define the care relationship and the power position of the caregiver and receiver (Crenshaw; Pan 7–17).

Step 5: Normative interpretation. It is only after completing textual and theoretical analysis that the relevant findings are tied up with SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10 and 16 (United Nations).

In such a way this approach distinguishes textual evidence from theoretical conclusions. A scene of suffering is not necessarily an example of care injustice, neither is an SDG relevant simply because a scene can be linked to a social problem.

Table 4. Analytical Procedure for Reading *The Grip of Change* through Care Ethics

Stage	Analytical focus	Method of interpretation
1. Textual identification	Significant scenes involving suffering, responsibility, labour, care, violence, agency, and collective action	Close reading of relevant passages from <i>The Grip of Change</i>

2. Care classification	Caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care receiving, and caring with	Interpretation through Tronto's political ethics of care
3. Identification of inequality	Unequal recognition, responsibility, care labour, reception, and participation	Identification of patterns of care injustice
4. Intersectional reading	Interaction of caste, gender, patriarchy, and social marginalization	Intersectional interpretation of characters and relationships
5. Sustainable-development linkage	Gender equality, well-being, decent work, reduced inequalities, and justice	Interpretive connection with relevant SDGs
6. Synthesis	Relationship between unequal care relations and sustainable justice	Development of the study's concept of care injustice

Source: Developed by the researcher based on Tronto's political ethics of care and the qualitative analysis of P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*.

5.4 Scope and Limitations

The study focuses only on one literary text and thus cannot make any claims about statistical or universal generalization. The results of the study are interpretative. Since the research is based on an English translation, linguistic details that can be found in the original Tamil text cannot always be restored. In the future, comparative research of other works by Dalit women and, when needed, of empirical data of care institutions and care work can verify the suggested theoretical framework.

6. Textual Analysis and Findings

In P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*, caste and gender inequality are illustrated in terms of violence, work, vulnerability, political interference, and inequality of care. Tronto's political ethics of care can be used as a theoretical framework to analyze the five aforementioned interrelated processes – recognition of the need, assumption of responsibility, care performance, reception of care, and participation in collective care (Tronto, 1987, 1993, 2013). The analysis is based on the episodes from the novel and interpretation of their meaning using the theoretical framework. It corresponds to the qualitative nature of the study.

Table 5. Primary-Text Analysis of Care Injustice in *The Grip of Change*

Care dimension	Primary textual evidence	Interpretation	Care injustice
Caring about	Thangam narrates her assault and exploitation to Kathamuthu (Sivakami, 2006, pp. 6–7)	Her suffering becomes visible, but its meaning is subsequently controlled by others	Recognition injustice
Taking care of	Kathamuthu takes up Thangam's case and changes the petition into a caste-based political claim (Sivakami, 2006, p. 10)	Protection becomes connected to political authority	Responsibility injustice

Caregiving	Thangam's dependence on agricultural labour exposes the relationship between economic survival and sexual exploitation (Sivakami, 2006, p. 7)	Labour and vulnerability are inseparable	Labour injustice
Care receiving	Thangam's own account conflicts with the version constructed on her behalf (Sivakami, 2006, p. 10)	Protection does not guarantee agency	Reception injustice
Caring with	Thangam's case becomes a collective caste-political issue without equivalent control by Thangam over the political response	Collective action remains unequal when the affected subject is excluded from decision-making	Democratic care injustice

Source: Author's analysis based on Sivakami (2006) and Tronto (1987, 1993, 2013).

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1 Caring About: Recognition of Vulnerability

Tronto's definition of caring about concerns recognition of need (Tronto, 1987). In the novel, Thangam's vulnerability is revealed via various kinds of violence. Being expelled from school and attacked, she discloses her story of sexual exploitation by Paranjothi Udayar. This moment is important since the vulnerability of Thangam is not generated only by her gender. She is a Dalit woman who is dependent on agriculture work, and the one who exploits her is socially and economically dominant. Therefore, her statement reflects the intersection of caste, gender, and class. The published criticism of the novel points to this moment as essential for the comprehension of the link between caste, labour and sexual exploitation.

But recognition of suffering does not imply recognition of Thangam as an independent subject. When the case of Thangam becomes politically useful for someone else, she loses control over the way her suffering is represented. Thus, the novel illustrates recognition injustice: suffering is recognized, but the recognition of sufferer's authority over his/her suffering remains questionable.

6.2 Taking Care Of: Protection and Authority

Taking care of in Tronto's definition is an assumption of responsibility for answering to the need (Tronto, 1993). At first glance, Kathamuthu assumes such kind of responsibility when he takes up the case of Thangam and starts demanding the action towards those who caused her suffering.

But Sivakami shows us another side of such an intervention into the life of Thangam. Kathamuthu changes the representation of her complaint and tells her not to oppose to him in the way he represents her suffering:

"I've changed the whole story." (Sivakami, 2006, p. 10)

Importance of this statement is that the shift from responsibility to answering Thangam's need is replaced by control over political representation of this problem. This moment has been mentioned by previous scholars as a crucial moment of transformation of Thangam's private grievance into public caste-political conflict.

Therefore, protection is not shown as a completely emancipating act. While Kathamuthu's intervention breaks upper-caste dominance, his authority limits the control of Thangam over her own story. Hence, the novel shows responsibility injustice – the acquisition of decision-making power over the protected

person by assuming responsibility for protecting her.

6.3 Caregiving: Labour and Economic Vulnerability

Tronto's conception of caregiving emphasizes paying attention to labor through which human needs are met (Tronto, 1993). Thangam's labor in Udayar's field is especially relevant as economic compulsion makes her dependent on the sexual exploitation of the man she works for.

The fact that Udayar is her "paymaster" shows the direct link between labor and vulnerability (Sivakami, 2006, p. 7). In this case, it is evident that caste and gender inequality are produced through the material relations of labor. While Thangam's labor allows her to survive, economic dependency prevents her from resisting.

Thus, this reading corresponds with contemporary scholarship dedicated to the issue of inequality in care and labor (Ilkcaracan, 2025; Kabeer, 2025). The described situation may be viewed as labor injustice as marginalized individuals carry the burden of socially necessary labor while being vulnerable economically and socially.

6.4 Care Receiving: Agency and Voice

According to Tronto, care receiving requires attention to the person's response to the received care (Tronto, 1993). Thangam's case is especially relevant in this regard. While Kathamuthu's intervention is seen as an effort to get justice done, his rewrite of the complaint diminishes Thangam's agency and the possibility to represent her experience.

Therefore, the tension is in the need to receive protection and retain one's agency at the same time. While Thangam is not a passive recipient of care but rather someone who speaks about her experience and objects to the way in which her case was represented, her voice is increasingly determined by the political power of men.

This reading helps to develop an intersectional perspective of Thangam's position since her

limited agency cannot be separated from her identity as a Dalit woman (Crenshaw, 1991; Pan, 2018).

6.5 Caring With: Collective Action and Participation

While the concept of caring-with extends care from individual responsibility to democracy and shared responsibility (Tronto, 2013), the Thangam case changes from the realm of personal suffering into collective caste politics. This shift undermines the power of upper-caste politics but creates a new problem of representation.

The key opposition here is between taking action for a vulnerable subject and acting with this subject. While Kathamuthu's political act shows the former better than the latter, it is Thangam's personal suffering that serves as the grounds for collective political activism, and the extent to which she is able to control its terms is limited.

Therefore, the example of the novel demonstrates care injustice in democratic politics: collective reactions to injustice may continue being unequal despite the marginalized subjects being represented rather than fully involved in the political process.

7. Discussion

As shown through the textual analysis, care in *The Grip of Change* turns out to be politically ambiguous. It may respond to vulnerability and at the same time perpetuate inequalities of authority. This paper extends the current academic discussion about the issues of caste, body politics, Dalit women's identity, patriarchy, resistance, resilience, and political transformation in the novel (Ghosh, 2021; Pan, 2018; Simon, 2023; Mohanty & Babu, 2025; Maharaj, 2025; Chandramani & Padhi, 2026; Roy & Choudhury, 2025). The main contribution of this study consists in identifying care injustice as a particular instrument that produces such inequalities. Intersectionality helps understand how caste and gender together contribute to Thangam's vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1991), while Tronto's

theoretical framework allows one to understand how need, responsibility, labour, reception, and participation shape care (Tronto, 1987, 1993, 2013).

Three of the findings merit emphasis in particular. Firstly, visibility does not always result in equality of voice. Thangam's pain comes to visibility, but the political interpretation of it will then be made by others. Secondly, protection may entail domination. Kathamuthu's intervention is both opposed to caste domination and limits Thangam's freedom in narrating her own story. Finally, collective action is not necessarily a manifestation of democratic care. An oppositional response may prove inadequate in terms of participation. The findings thus allow for a cautious link to sustainable development. Modern studies on the economy of care focus on the interaction between care, gender inequalities, work, and social organization (Ilkcaracan, 2025; Kabeer, 2025). In the novel, there is a literary contribution that illustrates how such structural issues manifest themselves through the vulnerability of a particular Dalit woman. The relevant SDGs are thus SDGs 5, 8, 10, and 16.

8. Conclusion

In this regard, the current study has highlighted *The Grip of Change* as an example of caste and gender inequality through unequal care relations as well as violence and domination. Analyzing the novel with the use of Tronto's political ethics, one can identify five interlinked aspects of care injustice, namely, recognition, responsibility, labor, reception, and democratic participation. Through the primary-text analysis, one can see that Thangam's suffering becomes obvious within the intersectional dynamics of caste and gender hierarchies, while the intervention that aims at her protection becomes an instrument of control over the interpretation of her situation. Furthermore, through economic dependency, the character links labor with vulnerability, while lack of participation in making the decisions related to her case shows the inefficiency of protection without agency. The main contribution of the study is creation of the concept of care injustice, which is gender and caste sensitive. This concept does not replace intersectional theory or Dalit feminist criticism; instead, it links both approaches to political ethics of care in order to analyze how inequality works through vulnerability, protection, labor, and intervention. Thus, it becomes evident that the novel shows that social justice requires much more than protection.

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