

Meena Kandasamy: A rebellious spirit and emerging voice of Dalit Women's writing.



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Abstract: The aesthetics of Dalit literature is recognized internationally. It has failed to adequately acknowledge the dalit women's issues. It is in this context that the name of Meena Kandasamy becomes important. She was born in 1984 in Chennai as the first daughter of two university professors. Her literary outputs were not some sweet ruminations of a romantic youth nor is it a nostalgic lament for lost lover as is usually expected of her age. Her first anthology of poems breathed fire, it was a flame which burnt all the age old superstitions and customs around which she was nurtured as a women. The present paper seeks to study the writings of Meena Kandasamy, I will try to portray her rebellious spirit and emerging voice of dalits in General and Dalit Women writings in particular.

Keywords:- Marginalization, Militancy, Social Fabric, Guerilla, Sanskritization, Tattoo.

The contradictions of socio-economic order in India remain almost the same even after 63 years of independence. Half a century is a considerable period of time for a society, state and nation to realize its mistakes and imbalances. But even at the beginning of the 21st century neither the society nor the state in India has been able to resolve its contradictions. Despite the Constitutional commitment of the post-colonial state towards the goal of equality, liberty and justice, the age old structure of inequality has not been dismantled. Social and economic inequality still occupies the centre-stage of Indian reality. The ideals of social democracy and distributive justice, in their essence, remain elusive. On the contrary, the vast majority of the Indian population is deprived socially, economically, politically and educationally. The social opportunities, offered to the citizens by the state, are confined to the privileged sections of society. The deprived and disadvantage groups are still exposed to the experiences of cumulative inequality. These marginalized groups have yet to experience fully the so-called fruits of modern development. There is a tremendous gap between the

population of the upper castes and the Dalits who constitutes more than 16 per cent of the Indian population. The upwardly mobile other backward castes have, of course, challenged the hegemonic structure of the upper castes (Brahminical) order and they have crystallized themselves as a major economic and political power in independent India. But as far as the social status of Dalits is concerned, no substantial changes have taken place during the six decades of development planning. They are still rated at the underside in the socioeconomic structure.

It is widely acknowledged that traditional Indian society was based on varna and jati. This system is very ancient in origin and through the passage of time it has undergone profound changes, but caste still a very powerful institution in our socio-economic, religious and political organization. The most disquietening and disturbing feature connected with the caste system has been the concept of untouchability. Those who were engaged in unclean occupation were considered as polluted persons and had to go with this stigma in the prevailing reality and had to accept for themselves the status of untouchables. Over the period of time, the various social and religious movements strived to make a dent in the social system in favour of the Dalits. Several saints, social reformers and political leaders from both the Dalits and non-Dalits had tried their best for the eradication of untouchability from the social fabric. But the impact of some reform movements was short-lived because the reformers fought within the caste system. However, their attempt was to facilitate certain caste groups simply to move up within the caste hierarchy through sanskritization. In fact, these movements were reform oriented rather than providing protection against the existing inequality in the social system.

Writers in Indian English literature strived for the upliftment of Indian society for which they were supposed take on board every section of the society in their writings. These writers never hesitated in portraying the actual status of the people in Indian society. More and more writers took pen to portray the marginalized sections of the society, female issues, dalit issues, untouchability were main concerns of their writing. The post colonial writings in Indian English are mainly revolutionary writings. Indian English writers inspired by the French Revolution, Marxist Revolution, American Revolution took their writings towards the upliftment of oppressed sections of the society. It is in this sense that the name of Meena Kandasamy is important. Meena Kandasamy known as Ms Militancy not only raised the issues of dalits but to a great extent she may be called as Dalit-Feminist writer.

In the forward to Meena Kandasamy's '*Anthology of poems Touch*' Kamla Das wrote "once again with the power of honest poetry while I was reading Meena Kandasamy with her preoccupations with the issue of caste system and violence meted out on the Dalits is considered as an emerging voice in the Dalit literary scenario. Dalit literature primarily a literature of Resistance received world wide acclaim with the growing translations of works of Dalit writers from regional languages into English.

Female writers of Indian English literature, English literature, American Literature in the postcolonial times primarily focused upon the problems faced and violence meted out to the women in their day to day life. In their writings these female writers stressed upon the social upliftment of the women. The marginalized and alienated women found their voice in the writings of these female writers. While as dalit women writers focused upon the problems faced by the dalit women in india and tried their best to abolish this social bias meted out to the dalits in general and dalit women in particular by giving their sigs a rebellious voice in their writings.

Meena Kandasamy's writings prove that to be a female writer and a Dalit female writer is not one and the same. Tamil Dalit women are triply victimized, and the ne w generation o f Dalit woman are not ready to accept this forced social inequality. The y want the whole world to hear f their plight. They want to retaliate. They are aware of the society which only controls them by pretending to agree to all their demands. They are not fighting for a place in the old age stifling tradition. They want to rebuild this pretence of a respectable tradition. Referring to her anxiety of living in this unkind society *Kamala Das* says,

“Dying and the resurrecting herself again and again in a country that refuses to forget the unkind myths of caste and perhaps religion, Meena carries as her twin self her shadow the dark cynicism of youth that must help her to survive”.

She knows that this tradition is too narrow to contain the variety of her experiences and paraphernalia of her imaginations. So she wants to follow a tradition of militant Dalit literature.

Meena Kandasamy hailed as the “first Indian woman writer writing Dalit poetry in English belongs to a long tradition of militant Dalit Literature” that not only focuses on the multi faceted atrocities faced by Dalits along with their material and ideological paradigms, but also articulates the need for active Resistance. In the process her poetry both in *Touch* and in the aptly titled *Ms. Militancy* offers re-evaluation of our supposed “national culture” and the icons of our supposed “national history”..... Functioning according to her own analogy as a guerilla without guns, her poetry not only offers a stringent critique of cattiest ideologies but also excavates those abysmal crevices of our “imagined community” whose depths are inhabited by countless subalternized communities.

Meena Kandasamy's polemical disagreement with the established myths, tradition and history are seen in the preface to her second collection of poems *Ms. Militancy* reading ‘Should you Take Offence ’

You are the repressed Rama from whom I run away repeatedly.
 You are the Indra busy causing bloodshed. You are Brahma
 fucking up my fates. You are Manu robbing me of my right to
 live and learn and choose. You are the sage Gautama turning
 your wife to stone. You are Adi Sankara driving me to death.
 You are all the me n for whom I would never moan, never

mourn. You are the conscience of this Hindu society.

Indian epic stories like Mahabarata and Ramayana haven't caused any improvement in the lives of women she says. It has long been since it stayed the same. Times and people have changed but the myths have not. To the new woman's horror the Sita and the Draupadi are still quoted by people. Women are forcefully made to adopt them as guiding stars. But a very simple and obvious question arises – how does it match when Sita and Draupadi remain the same and the males in these myths are replaced by rapists like Govind achamy. Hence she retorts thus,

I am no atheist – I allow everyone an existence. It is just that I struggle, with any story that has stayed the same way for far too long. So my Mahabarata moves to Las Vegas; my Ramayana is Retold in three different ways. I am unconventional but when I choose to, I can carry tradition that is why I am Mira, And al and Akka Mahadevi all at once, spreading myself out like a feast, inviting the gods to enter my womb. I am also Karaikkal Ammaiyyar suspected of infidelity for being ravishingly beautiful. Like each of these women, I have to write poetry to be heard, I have to turn insane to stay alive.

Some of Kandasamy's poems even though convey a sense of ease and familiarity most of them share a sinister lament for change. These poems are jarring for an audience who knows where she comes from. But they are at loss of words once they go through the history of her times. In spite of their awareness of the social hierarchies people still exclaim as if unaware "do such systems still exist? To such a heartless question her poems are a silent reply.

Society has always been harsh to people who refused to follow, and Kandasamy's case is no different. In spite of the harsh criticisms meted out to her second collection of poems Ms. Militancy, she stands firm. She agrees that her language is dark and explosive.

My language is dark and dangerous and desperate in its eagerness to slaughter your myths. My lines are feverish with the heat of the bodies you banish in your Manusmriti and Kamasutra. Tamil woman that I am, I do not spare the ageist, lassicist, sexist Tholkappium either. The criticism that I embark on like your codification and like my cunt is beyond all culture.

Her poems do try to dislodge the myths that claim female mind and body. After all a little explosion is essential to crumble the age old superstitions.

Kandasamy's preface to the second collection of poems Ms. Militancy makes it evident that she expected such criticism and she clearly answers them,

Call me names if it comforts you. I no longer care. The scarlet letter is my monogram. I saw it on everything I wear. I tattoo it into permanence. I strive to be a slut in a world where all sex is sinful. I strive to be a shrew in a society that believes in suffering in silence. I strive to be sphinx; part woman part lioness, armed with all the lethal riddles.

These words do not suffice her as a response to the futile, heartless words of the critics and the institutions which pretend to un-heed her cry for a change. So she continues, come unriddle me. But be warned. I never falter in a flight. And for worse, I reduce shamelessly.

She cannot bear the silence of the authorities. So she daringly challenges them to react. Her bold poems are a challenge to enter the battlefield for she is confident that once the war begins she can coax them into senses.

Thus we cannot but agree with Kamala Das's words of Kandasamy and wish her the same

I acknowledge the superiority of her poetic vision and wish her access to the magical brew of bliss and tears each true poet is forced to partake of day after day month after month, year after year....

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