



ANALYSIS OF THE POEMS OF MEENA KANDASAMYAS A VOICE OF MARGINALIZED

Jyoti

M.A English Department, MDU Rohtak, Haryana and UGC (NET Qualified)

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Abstract:

Poetry is considered as the oldest form of literature which has depicted the existing societal set ups not only in Britain but also in the countries all over the world. The term Dalit literature reflects the marginalized strata of the society throwing the lights on the miserable condition, predicaments, suppressions, pains and sufferings in reaction to the behaviour and treatment they receive from the higher class in Indian society. Meena Kandasamy is a well known poet, writer, translator and activist who fiercely uses her works to speak for the marginalized, and has gained immense appreciation from the literary networks. Meena is widely known for her unapologetic approach towards fighting patriarchy and the caste system. Meena Kandasamy's poetry is at best in echoing the personal sensibilities of the oppressed class. As a new woman she raises her voice against the gender inequality and systematic subjugation of Indian women. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the Poems of Meena Kandasamyas a Voice of Marginalized.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Marginality, Subjugation and Gender Inequality

Introduction:

Every culture and social settings give rise to varied literary traditions. There are some the principles that govern the social, religious and cultural orientations of a society. There are voices which continuously emerge as the forerunners of changes, transformations, revolutions and rebellions. Indian society has some sort of social mechanisms, arrangements, customs and institutions that act as covert modes of establishing and perpetuating the subjugation of women. India, being a male-dominated, patriarchal society, deprived women of their basic rights as human beings. Woman was denied along with many other rights, the right to education and the decisive power about her own life and was not even considered worthy of treating as a human being equal with man, rather she was, and still is, viewed as the other of man. The age old caste system has experienced the long stories of deprivation, exploitation and suppression. The scheduled caste has usually been termed as Dalit in social setting.

The term Dalit means oppressed and usually taken as the synonym of untouchable in India. Etymologically, it comes from the Sanskrit word 'Dalita' which means 'scattered', 'broken', 'split', 'divided'. The term dalit is used to indicate 'the crushed', 'suppressed', 'down trodden', 'deprived' or 'broken to faces'. Dalit literatures in India are revolutionary, or structurally substitute to the models prescribed by traditional Hindu aesthetics because they are literatures of sociological subjugation and economical abuse. Dalit literatures are essentially a shock to traditional Literature, as it speaks of the people who were never cared and not even considered as human beings. They are an attack to the anthropomorphic practice of casteism in Indian social convention. While the mere survival of the downtrodden people in the caste-ridden pre-Independent Indian society itself was perilous, it was considered more unauthorised to work for their easy access to rights and privileges. But with the selfless efforts of national leaders like Gandhiji, Dr. Ambedkar, the curse of untouchability was abolished in 1950. Despite that, the subaltern community experienced widespread exploitation and humiliation. After getting independence, the new government ensured all its citizens the equal right. But dalits have suffered a lot few decades after India's getting freedom.

Despite the constitutional safeguards today, the situation of the woman in modern India has, if not wholly, remained unchanged to great extent; if equality persists, so does discrimination, domestic violence, ill-treatment, subjugation and so on; man is still the head of the family, dowry, albeit covertly, is still taken from the bride's family, the cases of sexual assault on women are quite often heard, woman is yet to be given the complete decisive power about the issues like her career, marriage and many other issues pertaining her life.

The Indian caste system also has relevance to the women's discriminatory status. The features of the caste system like endogamy act as a mechanism of retaining control over the labour and sexuality of women, the concepts like purity and pollution, which segregate people from each other and regulate mobility of women deprecate the issue of gender equality further. The most effective weapon which helped in the perpetuation of the untouchability and women's unequal status was the institutionalized denial, to the weaker sections of society and women, of access to educational resources.

Casteism, Untouchability and Female Subjugation in the Poems of Meena Kandasamy:

Meena Kandasamy, the first Indian woman poet writing Dalit poetry in English, in her poetry, raises her voice against the gender inequality and systematic subjugation of Indian woman. Her poetry arises not out of

her reading and knowledge, but out of her own experience and active engagement with the cause of championing caste and gender equality.

Meena Kandasamy, being both Dalit and women writer mostly focuses on the issue of caste and untouchability- something that stems from her being a Dalit, considered the lowest and most oppressed of India's castes and formerly known as 'untouchables'. For Dalit women, oppression often means sexual conquest too. Kandasamy's poetry constitutes a sense of gender relations and issues of Dalit. One of the prime targets of Meena Kandasamy is Hindu society and in her poems, she repeatedly goes back to Hindu and Tamil myths. Despite the fact that the Indian constitution abolished this system, Dalits still face widespread discrimination.

Meena Kandasamy opens stage to defend themselves and act as a liberate women from their subservient position with the potency of cognizance to give them a transformative action against patriarchal rules, political structures and caste system of society, through her women characters pictured in her poetical works. Meena Kandasamy's major concern is to women especially the marginalized Dalit women to get vista and knowledge about their pathetic condition. As a new woman she raises her voice against the gender inequality and systematic subjugation of Indian women. Her poetry provides a visual impact; it is eminent for present generation to leads their lives with overfilling awareness for the readers. She breaks the long silence that has circumvented Indian traditional women, their feminine experience and their female world.

The new powerful woman who comes more with self-confidence, adept competitive, and self-guiding and she reclaims her individual identity and redefined in the brightness of her feminine sensibility and awareness. The sparkling idea of 'New woman' is beyond everything, as a new icon and re-established and transformation taking place in the virtues of old-fashion, which concerns individual woman in everywhere from the world and encourage them to fight against the prevalent strong patriarchal system in which caste, class, gender, sex, race, violence, molestation and psychological torture are the factors of oppression. New Woman has reached the society for maintaining human connection between communities of people and enable women and men to be pro-convivial with better understanding and interpersonal relationship.

In Meena Kandasamy's poem 'If everything comes crashing down' she explicates how the man engenders new women.

...But in billboards planted
Across my fervent heart,
I will celebrate you as the man
Who made me woman. (Kandasamy Touch, 30)

Meena Kandasamy reflects pain, agony, violence and restrictions of being Dalit women in a subordinated status are in search for self-identity or individuality in the world where they exists to prove them. She handles her poems with all its precision of the emergence of new woman who has transcended the boundaries of the female gender. Meena Kandasamy is the polemical writer who utilizes her pen as a sword to fight the monster that is Caste. In her poem Mohan Das Karamch and, very rigorously she criticizes him and caste as a militant feminist. You knew, you bloody well knew. Caste won't go; they wouldn't let it go (Kandasamy Touch, 54)

Meena Kandasamy redefined their identity in the light of feminist theories. Apologizes for living on is one of the best poems of Meena Kandasamy which reflects the helplessness of women who want to be free like a bird but remained prevaricated to restrictions. In her lines:

I was a helpless girl
Against the brutal world of
Bottom patting and breast-pinching
I was craving for security
The kind had only known while
Aimlessly-a float and speculating in the womb (Kandasamy Touch, 122)

The ultimate responsibility of 'New Woman' is to give voice to a voiceless woman in the society and making a deeper commitment to the overall well-being of the humanity. 'New Woman' is concerned about emotional, spiritual, political, biological and ecological perspectives of women community in the entire society. She draws the tormented picture of Indian marginalized woman and protest apart from her familial emotion and duties to which women were subjected and subjugated by the society. In a poem entitled A Cunning Stunt, Meena Kandasamy writes:

Cunt now becomes seat,
Abode, home, lair, nest, stable,
And he opens my legs wider
And shoves more and shoves
Harder and I am torn apart
To contain the meanings of
Family, race, stock, and caste
And form of existence

And station fixed by birth

And I can take it no more (Kandasamy Ms Militancy, 11)

Meena Kandasamy celebrated her womanhood by singing women's dreams and her writings arouse consciousness in women's mind, shift from a marginal position and become the mouthpiece for every woman to protest against the society which conceives the obstruction to the development of their own personality.

Kandasamy tries to prove the serenity of the touch which has been unnaturally transformed into a tabooed form when a touchable gets touched by an untouchable human being; the traditional Indian myth of impurity revives itself. The mere touch of a classless can create havoc in a caste Brahmin's world-order; everything becomes impure: water, dynasty, and even God. The tragedy of a man who wants to thank his God for the last time because his disease wrecked self has come across a partial recovery from the "Ten days of Typhoid" gets depicted in Kandasamy's poem "Prayers". When away from the temple he bends in supplication, because he is barred to enter a caste Hindu temple, the intolerant public cannot bear it. This is how sarcastically she portrays the consequences:

"An irked Rajput surged forth

and smote the untouchable with a iron rod.

He, worrier cast lion couldn't tolerate encroachment.

At the temple. By a Dalit." (Kandasamy Prayers57)

The poet is in possession of numerous stories, some of which have got narrated and some have gone unreported. The atrocities of the past and present are transformed to the readers of the present to make them aware of the realities faced by the depressed people and preserved for the future. It is devotion for which Dalits die. Caste which is crueler than disease is emotionless, and dry. It takes its toll.

Kandasamy's poems portray such a dreadful picture of varied agonies experienced by Dalits that her poems seem as an encyclopedia of painful inventories. Untouchable turns into touchable for upper caste when it fits their selfish deeds and lusty demands. As in the poem entitled "Narration" the lady narrates:

"I'll weep to you about

My landlord, and with

My mature gestures-

You will understand.

The torn sari, disheveled hair

Stifled cries and meek submission.

I was not an untouchable then." (Kandasamy Narration56)

In another poem entitled "Shame" the poet describes the fate of a gang-raped girl who fails to gain any kind sympathy from the people because she was a Dalit. It is the victim who gets victimized time and again.

There seems no option left for her except to silently embrace death. Her caste makes her more vulnerable to harassments and prone to sexual crimes. "The caste factor", says Gopal Guru also has to be taken into account which makes sexual violence against dalit or tribal women much more severe in terms of intensity and magnitude. It is the food and water, the most precious commodities for which a Dalit has to struggle the most. Telugu poet Jeshuva writes:

"When his (dalit) hand do not work

The green fields hesitate to yield crops

He sweats, provides food for the world

But he himself has no food."

Ironically it is the poor low caste who produces food grains and for his own consumption he has to depend on the left over crumbs. What is more helplessness than those episodes of Dalit history when they are termed as the most evil beings in the natural world.

"We are made to sit opposite you'

Force-fed a 'meal' - bland food mixed

With your hair, nails, spit and pus.

Illegally (despite the government ban),

We take your hoard of evil spirits

Barter-system; for having your food." ((Kandasamy 45)

Kandasamy deliberately renews the loss of subaltern history. She suspects that Dalit history has been destroyed by their opportunist social rivals. She, not only laments the loss of history but also the remnants of the destroyed history, which have been used against the weak and thus perform the function of a definite boundary from which it is nearly impossible to make a way-out for a Dalit. Meena Kandasamy reiterates the scarcity of water for Dalits because they are barred to reach the sources of clean water. They have to carry to their homes is the contaminated 'water' of Buffalo Baths, Urine and Bullshit. There are only two available options for any person of group to face the unlawful, tyrannical hardships; either to bear and wait for a natural change or to speak out in a revolutionary style.

Kandasamy criticizes the silence of Dalits in an oblique way saying that “Ours is a silence / that waits. Endlessly waits. And then, unable to bear it / any further, break into wails”. (Kandasamy 38)

She predicts and foretells in an apocalyptic style the approaching revolution in which the powerless Dalits will assume power and take revenge of all those misdeeds they were subjected to. She fancies herself being a witch and then wants to give vent to all her pent-up angry emotions which the centuries of atrocities have accumulated in her outcaste collective unconscious. She wants to fly to the temple street for hunting oppressors to shave their heads/cutting all their holy threads.

Conclusion:

Meena Kandasamy is a young woman who has shown her anger at the wounded society and writes poems denouncing the established social history of the depressed classes. She emerges as the champion of anti-caste or caste annihilation movement. Her literary activism has given fresh impetus to the Dalit movement. She speaks out the marginalization of every subaltern group in the society plagued with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, casteism, racism, and so on. Being a woman, her poems predominantly address the liberation of the rape victims, temple prostitutes, Dalit women, and brown women. Her poems assert her as an angry young woman. They are the manifestations of her anger over the dehumanized state of Dalits and the unjust taboos perpetrated by the upper caste people. As a Dalit writer, Kandasamy authentically speaks up the protest, revolution and rebellion as the need of the hour. She sternly believes in the complete overhaul of society. She wants to write the history of her community in a way to rediscover Dalit identity and to rewrite counter history. This paper aims to analyse Meena Kandasamy’s indignation and resentment towards social injustice inflicted on Dalit and Dalit women as revealed in her poems.

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