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(शिक्षण आणि समाज)

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Since 1977

The Quarterly dedicated to Education through Social Development and
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May 2023

(Special Issue-1I/ Volume-III)



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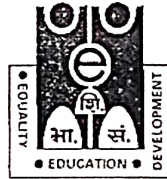
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Special Issue on the theme of
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Reflection of Gender Through Lance of Caste with Special
Reference to Meena Kandasamy's Touch (2006)

Dr. Kavita Tiwade
Associate Professor,
Head, Department of English, Vivekanand College, Kolhapur
Dr. Salama Maner
Assistant Professor,
Department of English, Vivekanand College, Kolhapur
(Autonomous)

Abstract:

Dalit feminism is a theoretical perspective that centers Dalit women's experiences and inhalation. Dalit feminist theory attempts to provide a more complete picture of gender-based investigation. Meena Kandasamy fights against society for Dalits. Her poetry is about caste and gender oppression. Her poems are predominantly centered on feminism and caste reform in the post-colonial period. Her poems reflect the inhuman treatment and violence given to Dalits. Kandasamy uses her poetry as a tool of opposition against the system of caste, which makes the upper class conquer the oppressed castes. Meena Kandasamy's first collection, Touch, is about inhuman stigmas attached to Dalits, especially their very 'touch' being considered polluted. The poet expresses her feelings towards the dilemma of Dalits through the biased and hypocritical customs and caste hierarchies that point out the binaries of the Dalits. In The Touch, Meena Kandasamy focuses on the world of Indian women's writing by setting a thoughtful view in literature. The present research paper attempts to study the caste and gender issues reflected in Meena Kandasamy's anthology Touch.

Keywords: Caste issues, Gender, Dalit, Feminism, Hypocrisy, Custom

Introduction:

Dalit literature in India emerged during the postcolonial period. It is a movement of Dalit writers in India against the caste system to understand caste-based literature. The caste system of socio-cultural structure in India is based on binary opposition. The social relationships of people among various cultures and the caste system help to maintain the difference and division of caste. As Joshi Prakash Bal mentioned in his book Dalit Literature in India: Review Voice of Protest in the Hindu, "Dalit literature is a form of Indian literature that focuses on the lines and struggles of the Dalit community." (Joshi Prakash Bal, 2019) Dalit literature has a unique space in Indian literature and the displacement of narrative worldview from the upper class to the Dalit. It is a part of the political and cultural transgression that challenges writings that validate a belief in a collective Nationalist Movement and the

conflation of caste and class politics in literature. Dalit literature emerged in the colonial and postcolonial periods, with Jyotirao Phule's *Gulamgiri* (1873) depicting the plight of the untouchables in India. The Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra and the influence of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar have played very significant roles in shaping Dalit literature across India. The writers, such as Sharankumar Limbale, Namdeo Dhasal, and Bama, have contributed to the Dalit literary movement. Dalit literature encompasses various Indian languages such as Marathi, Bangali, Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Siddhi, Odia, and Tamil. Dalit literature in Tamil has many women writers such as Sivakami, Edayavendan, Unjai Rajan Abimani, Bama, Anbadavan, Gunasekaram, Imaiyam, and others. A few novels, like Sivakami's *Pazhiyana Kazidalum* (1989) along with the autobiography *Karukku* (published in 1992) by Bama Faustina Soosairaj.

Meena Kandasamy is an emerging contemporary writer and activist who born in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. She has published two anthologies, *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010). She edited *The Dalit*, a bi-monthly alternative English magazine of the Dalit Media Network, from 2001–2002. She is one of the most remarkable Dalit young women writers in the historical backdrop of Tamil Dalit Literature. She fights against caste and gender discrimination through her writings.

This research paper attempts to explore the sufferings and dilemmas of *In Touch* and also analyze the grievances raised in it. The poems of *Touch* are divided into seven groups as follows: Bring him up to worship you, Touch and some spice, To that more congenial spot, Lines of control, Slander in a slaughterhouse, and Their Daughters. *Touch* is outraged by caste supremacy and the marginalization and humiliation experienced by Dalit women.

Hypothesis:

Dalits has the experience of humiliation, discrimination and inequality

Objectives:

- To understand the discrimination against Dalit women in Meena Kandasamy's poetry.
- To examine the causes and consequences of discrimination faced by Dalit women in the collection *Touch*
- To bring out suggestions and remedies for resolving social problems affecting Dalit women.

Research Methodology:

The present study has used a qualitative approach that involves various theories by well-known theorists to achieve its research output.

Scope and Limitation of the study:

Discrimination is a problem identified due to untouchable practices in India. There are several studies that highlight the caste problems in Indian literature. It appears that there are only a few attempts made to study Meena Kandasamy's poetry through a Dalit feminist perspective and their problems; therefore, this paper makes a modest attempt to bridge the gap between caste and gender.

The present research paper attempts to explore selected poems from Meena Kandasamy's collection *Touch*.

Theoretical Framework:

Feminism is an academic discourse about inequality between men and women and other gender minorities. Feminist philosophers hold various angles concerning the origin and causes of gender inequality in society. The emergence of Dalit feminism in interdependent Dalit women's organizations such as the National Federation of Dalit Women and the All-Indian Dalit Women's Forum, which evolved out of a strong feeling that Dalit women used to organize themselves in order to address their requirements, indicates that Dalit feminism is about 'Dalit women, which is associated with the intersection of caste and gender. In India, Feminism and Dalit politics are considered two individual and exclusive categories defining 'other women and Dalits.'

Dalit woman is considered "other" even among women of all castes. In seminal book, *Dalit Women: Fear and Discrimination*, Meena Anand ambient the condition of Dalit women. One even with a little human sensitivity gets stunned with the realistic and authentic accounts of the life conditions of the Dalits women, her suppression, humiliation, sufferings, dilemmas and exploitation. Her sufferings are twofold: she has her own share of universal suffering as women and additionally, she is victim of variety exploitations, social, religious, economic and cultural as Dalit women.

Dalit women are not only discriminated against by men and women of other castes. They are quite often subjected to domestic violence and are deprived of their basic rights. There is such a plight that they become the lame and meek victims who can't protest against the injustice done to them.

Meena Kandasamy is a Dalit feminist writer who explores the condition of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. Using a feminist and postcolonial framework, the research paper examines the intersectionality of caste and gender, highlighting the multiple types of oppression and discrimination faced by Dalit women in Tamil Nadu.

The present research paper incorporates Dalit feminist theory. Dalit feminist theory attempts to provide a complete picture of gender and caste-based investigation. *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader* radically redefines feminism by introducing the category of Dalit into the core of feminist thought.

Reflection of Gender through the Lance of Caste with special reference to Meena Kandasamy's *Touch* (2006)

Meena Kandasamy is the first Indian woman poet to write Dalit poetry in English. She raises her voice against gender inequality and the systematic conquest of Indian Dalit women. Her writings are not only the result of her reading and knowledge but also of her own experiences and active engagement with caste and gender inequality. *Touch* (2006), her first anthology, is an attack on caste and the social patriarchal oppression of women in general and Dalit women in particular. Dalits in India are those people who belong to the lower class and have also been considered to be poor and powerless. Meena Kandasamy praises Dalit critic Sharankumar Limbale for

creating new aesthetics and consciousness about the miserable and marginalized class. The poet encourages Dalit consciousness. Dalits are considered to create imbalances in the social structure. This imbalance within the people is considered to be one of the major problems of Indian culture.

Meena Kandasamy's writings mainly focus on gender and caste issues. The majority of her writings are based on feminism and the anti-caste movement for eradication. Her writings reflect her courage and rebellious nature in fighting against the unfair rules of society that affect primarily the untouchable section of society. Her views on gender and caste oppression are manifest in her works, social media, and different magazines. Jacob's express his views on Meena Kandasamy, He said that, "Meena Kandasamy and her poetry embody a long-standing fight against the stringent subjugation and atrocities undergone by the non-dominant caste community. While her poetry revolves around issues of caste, sexuality, political agendas, violence, gender operations, and language, her work mainly urges us to act." (Jacob 2019).

Meena Kandasamy's voices her anger against caste-based injustice which has impaired Dalits to dehumanized condition as they are subjected to oppression and humiliation. Her two collections of poetry *Touch* (2006) and *Ms Militancy* (2010) portray the real picture of the Dalits in Indian society. She voices her anger against caste-based society.

Touch, is one of the best examples of the idea of 'untouchability' by Meena Kandasamy. In this poem, she expresses her anguish over the betrayal coming from her own skin against the oppressed Dalits:

Have you ever tried meditation?
Struggling hard to concentrate,
And keeping your mind blank
As a whitewashed wall by closing
Your eyes, nose, and ears; and shutting out
Every possible thought
Everything. And, the only failure, that ever came,
The only gross betrayal Was from your own skin.
You will have known this. (*Touch* 1-10)

Here, the poet touches upon the state of suppression and disgrace experienced by her own caste. She asks the people to keep their minds as blank as a whitewashed wall, then struggle to meditate by closing eyes, nose, and ears; and shutting down every possible thought with the plan to recall the first moment at which the struggle between the Dalits and the upper class began.

The second stanza is about the first moment at which a Dalit experienced discrimination when their skin colour was blamed as a sin.

Do you still remember?
How did the first distractions arise?
And you blamed skin as a sinner;

How, when your kundalini was rising,
 shaken, you felt the cold concrete floor.
 skin rubbing against skin, your saffron robes,
 How, even in a far-off, different realm—
 your skin anchored you to this earth.
 Amidst all that pervading emptiness,
 touch retained its sensuality.
 You will have known this. (Touch 11-21)

The poet praises her own class as being "blank as a whitewashed wall". In contrast, she attributes the disvalue of betrayal and disloyalty to those of the upper class. In this, she expresses her annoyance and anguish against the oppressors of her own skin. In the last stanza, the poet ends by saying that touch, which transcend to experience a different area when mixed with caste and hatred for the lower caste of society, ultimately produces untouchables.

In the poem *Fleeting*, Kandasamy's approach towards caste inscription is everlasting; it just refuses to go, even if we erase our past, she is exposed in the poem *Fleeting*,

"And fleeting memories are p
 Imagery showcases stuff with zipiry dates.
 Caste perennially remains
 a scheming bulldozer
 Crushing Dalits

And reviewing, revoking the bitter past" (*Fleeting* 1-6)

The caste-ridden society splits even gods and bars the entity of untouchables from the temples. Meena uses her poetry as a means of conflict against her nationality.

In *Shame*, the poet explains the lives of women after being sexually abused by a group of men. This victim will not even get the sympathy of the people, and she was a Dalit woman. This victim is the one who becomes a victim again.

"Public's prying eyes
 Segregate her-the victim.
 But, the criminals have
 Already mainstreamed-
 heir caste is a classic shield." (Shame)

The lady who was gang raped would not have any option to cope with the sorrow other than to take the extreme step in her life. The caste is what makes her more vulnerable to this kind of brutal torture and would make her fall prey to sexual crimes. Gopal Guru states that "caste would also make Dalit and tribal women face sexual violence more intensely in society". (Krishnaswamy et al., 2001).

She wrote the same poem by changing the title to Mohandas Karamshand, who is the Indian "Daddy". She has composed a poem that addresses the father of the nation, where she clearly presents the crux of non-violence and ahimsa. In this poem, she has

double victims. They are exposed, deprived, assaulted, attacked, ambushed.

In "Liquid Tragedy: Karamchedu 1985," Meena Kandasamy writes about the Slaughter of Karamchedu which took place in 1985 in Andhra Pradesh where six Madiga (lower-caste) men are killed and three Madiga women are raped by the Kammas men (upper caste). The slaughter followed when a Madiga woman protested against the washing of buffaloes by the Kammas in the pond whose water the Madigas drank. Here, the poet records:

Buffalo Baths, Urine,
Bullshit Drinking
Water for the Dalits
The very same Pond.
Practice for eons.

A Bold Dalit lady dares to question injustice.
Hits forth with her pot.
Her indignation
Is avenged. Fury let loose.
Violence, Rapes. Killings

(Liquid Tragedy: Karamchedu 1985)

Through this poem Meena Kandasamy talks about the state of mind towards the marginalized. It seems strange that Unconcerned of passing many years of freedom, the illusion of social detachment is still unachieved and the denied are forced to lead a hidden life. It is influential in a caste-ridden Indian culture Madiga men are killed and the women are raped because they are socially and economically powerless. Unfortunately, there are many untouchables who are either murdered or raped every day, not for anything but because they are of the lowest caste.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Meena Kandasamy's selected poems from the collection, Touch presents truth of Indian society, where people living in the margins are still victims of irrational thinking. Her poetry attacks on the social discriminations enduring in the society such as caste system and suppression of Dalit women. She has humanitarian perspectives through her poems and her records strong protest against caste and gender based social structure. Meena Kandasamy writes about dalit women and their freedom, equality, fraternity, fairness to envision a space where they can live with dignity and self-esteem.

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