

Gender Persecution & Protest Mandate in Meena Kandasamy's Novels: A Social Hierarchy and Instability

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 4

Month: March

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 20.01.2024

Accepted: 23.02.2024

Published: 15.03.2024

Citation:

Quinn, Andrina
Genesia, and R.
Meena. "Gender
Persecution & Protest
Mandate in Meena
Kandasamy's Novels:
A Social Hierarchy and
Instability." *Shanlax
International Journal
of Arts, Science and
Humanities*, vol. 11,
no. S4, 2024, pp. 8–12.

DOI:

[https://doi.
org/10.34293/sijash.
v11iS4-Mar.7601](https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS4-Mar.7601)

Andrina Genesia Quinn

Part-Time Ph.D., Research Scholar

Viradhunagar Hindu Nadars Senthikumara Nadar College, Virudhunagar

Dr. R. Meena

Research Supervisor & Guide

Viradhunagar Hindu Nadars Senthikumara Nadar College, Virudhunagar

Abstract

Meena Kandasamy's novel, "The Gypsy Goddess," serves as a compelling exploration of subaltern voices, specifically delving into the intersections of caste and gender in Indian society. This paper critically analyses the nuanced portrayal of Dalits, particularly women, highlighting their struggles, resilience, and resistance within a complex web of societal norms. Through a multi-narrative structure and authentic language use, Kandasamy's work challenges readers to confront the entrenched inequalities and reflect on the urgent need for societal change. She addresses language identity, feminism, and the eradication of caste. Her book "When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" addresses how women in well-educated households are suppressed by patriarchal culture. The narrative centres on an accomplished Indian woman from a wealthy family who marries a reputable university professor. She outlines the feelings a woman experiences as she adapts to the circumstances in the household. By talking more about the conflict in her life, she tries to elevate herself to the level of a woman. She wishes to reveal to the world the humanity of women. She has the discernment to handle difficulties and hostilities without breaking down or becoming upset.

Keywords: Meena Kandasamy, The Gypsy Goddess, Subaltern Voices, Caste Dynamics, Gender Oppression, Dalit Women, Intersectionality, Resistance, Narrative Techniques, Indian Literature

Meena Kandasamy's "The Gypsy Goddess" stands as a powerful literary work that unearths the subaltern experiences of Dalits, emphasizing the intersections of caste and gender. This paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how Kandasamy portrays the struggles and resilience of the subaltern voices, particularly Dalit women, within the narrative. Through a thorough exploration of caste dynamics, gendered oppression, and acts of resistance, this analysis seeks to illuminate the complexities of Indian society as depicted in the novel. The novel unveils the deep-rooted caste hierarchies in India, illustrating how caste-based discrimination permeates various aspects of Dalit lives. Characters' narratives shed light on the normalized violence and systemic inequalities, challenging readers to confront the harsh realities of caste oppression.

Kandasamy's novels delve into the construction of caste as a social phenomenon, illustrating how it dictates individuals' identities, roles, and interactions. Characters often grapple with the expectations and limitations imposed by their caste, revealing the intricacies of the caste system as a societal construct. The novels vividly depict instances of caste-based discrimination, exposing the prejudices embedded in societal norms and institutions. Characters from marginalized castes navigate through systemic biases, portraying the harsh realities of inequality and injustice. Kandasamy skilfully intertwines caste dynamics with gender, highlighting the unique struggles faced by Dalit women. The intersectionality of caste and gender is explored, unveiling the specific challenges and forms of oppression experienced by Dalit women in a patriarchal society. The novels showcase instances of resistance and assertion against caste-based oppression. Characters defy societal norms, challenging the established power structures. Acts of rebellion, both individual and collective, become a powerful means of expressing agency and demanding societal change. Kandasamy employs various narrative techniques to bring forth the nuances of caste dynamics. Multiple perspectives, non-linear timelines, and authentic language use contribute to a rich and immersive storytelling experience. The use of dialects specific to characters adds authenticity, allowing readers to connect with the lived experiences of individuals from different castes. Through her novels, Kandasamy provides a critical examination of the caste system, exposing its dehumanizing effects on individuals and communities. The novels serve as a platform for social critique, urging readers to confront and challenge the existing caste-based hierarchies. Across Kandasamy's novels, there is an evolution in the portrayal of caste dynamics. From exposing the harsh realities in "The Gypsy Goddess" to delving into the intersectionality of caste and gender in "When I Hit You," there is a progression in the exploration of these themes. A detailed study of gendered oppression in Meena Kandasamy's novels reveals a profound exploration of the multifaceted challenges, violence, and resistance experienced by women in the context of Indian society. Kandasamy, known for her feminist perspectives, uses her works to interrogate patriarchal structures and bring to light the oppressive forces that impact women's lives. This analysis focuses on key novels by Meena Kandasamy, such as "When I Hit You" and "The Gypsy Goddess," to examine how gendered oppression is portrayed in her literary narratives. Kandasamy's novels intricately explore the intersectionality of gender and caste, particularly emphasizing the unique struggles faced by Dalit women. Characters navigate through a complex web of discrimination, highlighting how the intersection of gender and caste amplifies oppression.

The novels vividly depict various forms of violence against women, including physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Kandasamy does not shy away from portraying the harsh realities of domestic violence, sexual assault, and societal expectations that contribute to the oppression of women. Despite the pervasive gendered oppression, Kandasamy's novels portray women who resist and assert their agency in the face of adversity. Characters engage in acts of resistance, challenging oppressive norms and reclaiming their autonomy. Kandasamy critiques societal expectations placed on women, unravelling the double standards that constrain their choices and behaviour.

The novels expose how women are often subjected to judgment and scrutiny for deviating from prescribed roles, reinforcing oppressive norms. Kandasamy explores how institutional structures perpetuate gendered oppression, be it within the family, marriage, or wider societal frameworks. Characters confront systemic challenges, highlighting the need for broader societal change to address gender inequality. The novels reflect Kandasamy's feminist perspectives, engaging with feminist theories and ideologies to deconstruct patriarchal norms. Through the characters' internal dialogues and actions, Kandasamy challenges traditional gender roles and advocates for women's rights.

Kandasamy employs language and narrative techniques that capture the nuanced experiences of women. The use of authentic voices, internal monologues, and the exploration of subjective realities contribute to a rich and empathetic portrayal of gendered oppression. Across Kandasamy's novels, there is an evolution in the portrayal of gendered oppression. From the exploration of domestic violence in "When I Hit You" to the broader societal critique in "The Gypsy Goddess," there is a progression in the depth and scope of feminist narratives. A detailed study of resistance and empowerment in Meena Kandasamy's novels reveals a powerful exploration of the ways in which individuals, particularly women, navigate and confront oppressive structures within Indian society.

Kandasamy's works, such as "When I Hit You" and "The Gypsy Goddess," delve into the complexities of resistance against various forms of oppression, including caste-based discrimination and gendered violence. This analysis explores how characters in her novels engage in acts of resistance and empowerment, challenging societal norms and reclaiming agency. Kandasamy's novels portray characters who engage in small, yet significant, acts of defiance against oppressive norms. Individual resistance becomes a means of expressing agency and reclaiming personal autonomy in the face of societal constraints. Characters within the novels often come together in collective movements, challenging systemic oppression and advocating for social change. Kandasamy explores the power of collective action as a tool for resistance, emphasizing the strength found in unity. In the context of gendered oppression, characters navigate patriarchal constraints and resist societal expectations that limit their choices. The novels depict the complexities of challenging ingrained gender norms and the courage required to defy oppressive structures. Kandasamy's exploration of resistance extends to challenging caste hierarchies, with characters defying the entrenched discrimination and violence associated with caste. Acts of resistance become a way to question and disrupt the status quo, fostering a sense of empowerment within marginalized communities. The novels emphasize the importance of reclaiming personal narratives and stories as a form of resistance. Characters assert their voices and tell their stories, challenging the erasure and silencing often imposed by oppressive systems. Kandasamy skilfully intertwines resistance against caste-based discrimination with the fight against gendered oppression, acknowledging the intersectionality of these struggles. Characters resist not only specific forms of oppression but also the interconnected systems that perpetuate inequality. Everyday acts, whether symbolic or practical, become powerful tools of resistance in Kandasamy's novels.

The novels illustrate how seemingly small acts, when performed collectively, can have a profound impact on challenging oppressive structures. Education is often portrayed as a means of empowerment, allowing characters to challenge societal norms and gain the knowledge necessary for resistance. The novels highlight the transformative potential of education in breaking the cycle of oppression. Kandasamy's exploration of resistance draws parallels with real-world movements, reflecting the ongoing struggles against caste-based discrimination, gender violence, and other forms of oppression in contemporary India. A wide verity of literary forms, including poetry, lyrics, fiction, autobiographies, magic realism, hypertext, historical novel, graphic words and more, have been produced by Dalit literature. Dalit women's writing's hold a special place in Dalit literature because they address the shortcomings of both mainstream feminist movements and male Dalit literature, offering a distinct sense of identity and consciousness. Geetha notes, "Sine problems of Dalit women are subsumed under the mainstream male Dalit movement and the upper – caste feminist movement, Dalit women have endeavored to create a distinct space for themselves by mobilizing a Dalit feminist movement" (5) The Gypsy goddess tells the story of what happened before and after the horrifying kilvenmani. Massacre in 1968, in which upper class land lords planned to set fire to the Dalit streets of Pallars, Chakkiliyars and Paraiyars.

This novel aims to address both Dalit feminist and Dalit consciousness, and in order to do so, it should be seen as a distinctive contribution to the wide range of Dalit literature. The legend may also allude to the terrible powerlessness of the kilvenmani women and children, who were forced to remain inside their homes during the massacre while their men attempted to release their comrades who were being held captive by the landlord. This is consistent with K. Geetha's observation that Dalit women are disproportionately impacted by communal conflicts.⁽⁶⁾ She also says that Dalit women must courageously and tenaciously resist for as long as caste injustice persists. The author's assertion that "life is circular" encapsulates the need for Dalit resilience as seen from the perspective of Dalit women. She wrote this assertion in support of her decision to use a non-linear narrative approach for the book. The author discusses the various ways in which kilvenmani's Dalit women protest, struggle and seek justice, with a focus on women-specific issues like equal wages, breaks during work, the time to care for infants, etc. This brings these women's unwavering fighting spirit and resolve from the background to the forefront. They are actively addressing not only gender-specific issues but also the broader community's problems.

Throughout the book, the concept of Dalit women regaining centrality is explored in various settings. Kilvenmani's Dalit women came together to resolve their conflict over whether or not to remain in the communist party. The author states that "thus time did not do most of the talking" in place of customary village meetings (Kandasamy 77). This clear emphasis on contrariness accomplishes two goals at once: it acknowledged the patriarchy that Dalits face and gives Dalit women a voice to fight for their rights. This fits in well with the widely acknowledged states of intersectionality of class, caste, and gender as well as the double patriarchy suffered by Dalit women from Upper-caste men and males of Dalit Descent. It also aligns with the accounting of caste atrocities against women.

Dalit women's value is maintained even after the horrifying massacre occurs. The author outlines the wide variety of post-traumatic reactions that the residents of Kilvenmani have experienced. Men such as Muni "drown their sorrow's in drink (GG, 128); karuppaiah unable to control his torturous thoughts "takes away the only life he had" (GG, 137). Women's answers and reactions capture our interest. The hallucinations and psychological disorders displayed by women such as Letchumi, Packiam, Arumugam's daughter, and others reflect the horror of the massacre. The responses of women in particular retain their unique nature even when Maayi, the elderly woman claims that everyone in Kilvenmani carried the ghosts of their dead" Men were attempting to either forget the horrifying massacre or use their rage to get revenge. However, in an effort to preserve their story for future generations, women were holding onto the horrific experience in an attempt to resist the memories of the deceased. In addition, Maayi claims that the suffering experienced by the males who were physically normal "Prevented" them from "Vanishing into the other world (GG, 133). While both men and women were attempting to contain their rage and resist going insane, the author distinguished between the ways that women reacted so that women's consciousness was given adequate room. Another character called Thangamma. Who doesn't fall as a victim but rather strives to live and care for her village and stands a testimony of her past who courageously becomes a defender of the massacre by Kerosene Govinda who was one of the cruel landlords. Than gamma protested and overcame the assault for the sake of her village and even Maayi finds a job of fighting back with passiveness and subjectivity and submissiveness with resilience, she says "Even if all of us are going to die, we will die in Kilvenmani itself" (GG,140). Here we see that the Dalit women are potentate in both form and context in *The gypsy goddess*.

Throughout Indian history, communism has been more than a minor factor in the struggle for the liberation of Labourers, workers, tribal people, and other oppressed groups. Nonetheless, dalitism and communism frequently had tense ties. In his seminal work "Annihilation of caste",

Dr. B. K. Ambedkar highlights the underlying fact that accounts for the divide between Dalitism and communism. However, neither Dalit literature nor Dalit movement gave up on using Marxist theory to understand Indian society. Sharan Limbale Highlights the essential characteristics of human liberation, rebellion against exploitation, and dalitism that are shared by both ideologies. The Dalit's struggle is not reduced by the author in India as a homogenous class of struggle. These novels show the conflicts and uprootedness of caste and feudalism. Therefore the Dalit's of Kilvenmani village are nonetheless a experience of" matter of pride and limit (kandasamy 56).

Conclusion

Meena Kandasamy's novels offer a profound exploration of caste dynamics, unravelling the layers of discrimination and inequality within Indian society. By skilfully interweaving caste with gender and employing diverse narrative techniques, Kandasamy creates narratives that not only expose the challenges faced by marginalized communities but also call for reflection and societal transformation. Her works contribute to a broader discourse on caste, challenging readers to engage critically with the complexities of caste dynamics in contemporary India. Meena Kandasamy's novels offer a rich and nuanced portrayal of resistance and empowerment. Through the exploration of individual and collective acts of defiance, the novels celebrate the strength and resilience of marginalized communities. Kandasamy's characters navigate through oppressive structures, challenging societal norms and advocating for social change. By shedding light on the complexities of resistance, the novels encourage readers to reflect on the transformative potential inherent in acts of empowerment against deeply entrenched systems of oppression. Meena Kandasamy's "The Gypsy Goddess" emerges as a profound exploration of subaltern voices, particularly those navigating the intersections of caste and gender. The novel not only unveils the harsh realities of oppression but also celebrates the resistance and resilience of the subaltern. Finally we must agree with B. Krishnappa who hails from Karnataka, who is a Dalit himself who expresses his protest of un justice laws laid by the upper – classes and his protestation and out cry of tumult for a revival mutiny. By employing a multi-narrative structure and authentic language, Kandasamy crafts a powerful critique that challenges readers to reflect on societal norms and the urgent need for change.

References

1. Ambedkar, B.R. *The Annihilation of caste*. Columbia Canter for Teaching and Learning, Columbia, 1936.
2. Christopher, K.W. "Casteing Narrative: Class and Religion in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial studies*, Vol. 17, no. 1, June 2014, pp 64 – 81.
3. Geetha, K.A. "A Dalit among Dalits – the Angst of Tamil Dalit Women". *Cross / culture*, no. 145,2012, pp. 411 – 432, 621. Proquest, WWW. Proquest. Com/ scholarly – journals/Dalit – among – angst – tamil – women / docview/ 1012582881/ sc – 2? accounted = 145163
4. Kandasamy, Meena. *The Gypsy Goddess* Atlantic Books, 2014. Library genesis, WWW. libgeis/ bo ok/index . php? Md5 = 2339886B338EB3975C40F5BE81659F3. EPUB download
5. Kandasamy, Meena. "The gypsy goddess. Juggernaut, 2014.
6. Krishnappa, B. "Dalit Literature." *An Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*. Edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, 2013pp. 106 – 116
7. Limbale, Shrankumar. *towards An Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and considerations*. Translated by Alok Mukherjee Orient Longman, 2004.
8. Mohanty, Satya. *Literary Theory and the claims of history: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics*. Cornell UP , 1997. P. 213