

Exploration of Power Dynamics in Meena Kandasamy's Poetry

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Abstract

Meena Kandasamy is one of the prominent and most celebrated authors of the contemporary world. Through her writing, Meena explores the narrative techniques of resistance to reclaim the voice of marginalized people against the hegemonic practices constructed in society by upper-class people. Thus, this paper explores the voice of the marginalized as a powerful tool for shaping the self to define the power dynamics portrayed in the form of Dalit politics through Kandasamy's notable poetical works. At the same time, the paper also explores the plight of women who experience, struggles through the lens of caste practices in the contemporary world. Henceforth, the paper withstands how Dalit Poetry explores the construction of self by resisting the practices alive through her remarkable political poetry titled 'Tomorrow, Someone Will Arrest You'. This idealistic poetry of Kandasamy portrays the radical thinking of women to overcome double oppression, which is remarked on by both caste and gender discrimination explored through contemporary practices in the social setup.

Keywords: Power Dynamics, Dalit Politics, Self, Contemporary Practices

Meena Kandasamy is one of the most celebrated and prominent women poets of Indian literature, who is globally recognized for her constant questioning about epistemic outbreaks of violence in contemporary practices. Meena, who was born in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, daughter of an academician, who started to adopt both her father's and mother's ideologies from her childhood days and explored her thoughts through her writing. 'Tomorrow, someone will arrest you' is one of her recent collections of poetry portrays her perception of uncontrollable anger and resilience by capturing the realities and virtues of contemporary India.

Meena Kandasamy's writing is usually centered on feminism and anti-caste movements and her poetry depicts caste-based issues, untouchability, identity, and gender relations which claims the argument under intersectionality of caste, class, race, and the exploitation based on gender. In her poetical works, Meena traces the eye-opening practices of contemporary society to the readers as a resistance towards the hegemonical practices of the caste system

along with gender discrimination in the aspects of social, economical, and moral perspectives. This makes her writings to consider as a voice of the marginalized and explores her writing verses as a clinch of the social milieu.

'Tomorrow, Someone Will Arrest You' is her recent collection of poetry proclaiming Meena as a stout-hearted and revolutionary voice in contemporary literature that projects the power dynamics of her writings. This poetry reflects the readers as a blend of political ideology and personal experience. Being a Dalit Poet, Kandasamy experiences double oppression in terms of both caste and gender by trying to cope with her desires, issues of sex, the exile crises, caste barriers, sacrifices with family, and the crises of identity. Unwavering this, she argues with the defiance by claiming the freedom of expression to probe the societal setup and its practices.

In this collection of poems, the readers can experience this as a piece of evidence to uplift the quality of oneness. In her words, Kandasamy gives a call to the readers to listen and engage with the injustices to gear up and denounce the inequalities and question the oppression made by the people who belong to the class of superiority.

Kandasamy in her writing, gives a powerful message to her readers to express the agony with concise expressions to withstand the practices to bring out the change and also encourages the readers to think about social justice and human rights. *'Tomorrow, Someone Will Arrest You'* is not just a collection of poetry but also inspires the readers to think about agitation, and movement to bring out the change.

On the other hand, Kandasamy's poetry predominantly deconstructs the patriarchal forces, which remarks on the uncomfortable circumstances in society. Being a voice of sociological critique, her voice seeks justice for women's identity by exploring the dynamics through her writing to claim the independence in hegemonic society to withstand an ideological power.

As a poet, she reclaims and explores the feminine desires and roles of the gender to outrage the supremacy of the upper class. She uses power dynamics as a poetic weapon for representing the resistance to reintroduce traditional narratives of female narratives, sexuality and desires.

Her poetry usually emphasizes feminine attributes, norms, and expectations by celebrating the power of writing which advocates societal constraints like self-love, shame, acceptance, and humiliation.

Meena, through her poetical works portrayed as a powerful voice of resistance who questioned the patriarchal society. She represented herself in all her works with various characters by representing herself as a person who was oppressed based on gender as well as caste. Thus, she also wishes to see herself as a Dalit women writer by representing the feminist spirit of exploring revolt with her anger and resilience with humiliation, and revolution with practices. Therefore, her writings are projected as a deconstructive tool of patriarchal authority's power dynamics.

Naidu's poetry reflects this realist perspective through her unfiltered representations of Indian society, from bustling marketplaces to traditional festivals, village life, and the plight of the marginalized. Her poems, such as *The Bangle Sellers* and *In the Bazaars of Hyderabad*, offer glimpses into everyday Indian life. In these poems, Naidu captures the vibrancy and richness of Indian marketplaces, vividly depicting the sellers and artisans and their cultural wares, revealing the fabric of Indian society with a realism that goes beyond surface-level beauty. For instance, in *The Bangle Sellers*, she portrays the stages of a woman's life through the symbolism of bangles, thus connecting her characters' lives to broader themes of tradition and identity. Naidu's portrayal of such scenes embodies realism as it captures authentic Indian experiences and social structures. Moreover, Naidu's work often centres on the social realities and constraints faced by Indian women, subtly challenging the norms that restrict them. In poems like *Village Song*, she gives voice to the internal conflicts faced by young women as they navigate societal expectations and

personal aspirations. Naidu's portrayal of women's lives and struggles resonates with a realist approach by shedding light on the hardships and desires of her female characters, thus echoing the social issues that realism seeks to bring to light. Her feminist perspective gives her poetry a dual focus, intertwining the beauty of Indian culture with a realistic depiction of the limitations imposed by tradition. Naidu's commitment to depicting the lives of ordinary Indians also extends to her portrayals of nature, which, rather than existing as an idealized or abstract concept, is an intrinsic part of the lives of her characters. In *The Coromandel Fishers*, for example, Naidu presents a realistic picture of the fishermen who brave the sea daily to make a living. Here, nature is both a source of beauty and a challenging force, integral to the survival of her characters. Naidu's portrayal of nature thus straddles Romanticism and realism, showing its impact on the lives of individuals and communities. Through her unique blend of realism and lyrical beauty, Naidu's poetry transcends conventional Romanticism and instead offers a deeply grounded, realistic view of Indian life. Her work has become a significant part of Indian English literature, preserving the essence of Indian culture and social concerns while providing insights into the human experience. By embracing realism alongside poetic lyricism, Sarojini Naidu's poetry remains relevant and impactful, giving voice to the spirit and struggles of her people. This paper seeks to analyse these thematic and stylistic elements in Naidu's work, demonstrating how she skilfully combines Romanticism and realism to establish herself as a pioneering voice in Indian English literature.

Her bold poem entitled "Backstreet Girls" subverts the traditional notion of purity and pinpoints a need for a collective agency to shun passive victimhood and societal rejection. "The title of the poem implies a counter-attack and non-conformity to the cultural orthodoxy and traditional dogmas that condemn women as licentious" (Patni 43). The poem makes a powerful call to these marginalized and isolated women to wear the badge of defiance to reclaim their bodies and spirit of autonomy. On their path of self-discovery, these women cannot be controlled, silenced, and subjugated by the chauvinist forces: -

Tongues untied, we swallow suns.
Sure as slut, we strip random men.
There's stardust on our lids. Naked.
There's self-love on our minds.
And yes, my dears, we are all friends.
There will be no blood on our bridal beds.
We are not the ones you will choose for wives.
We are not the ones you can sentence for life (Kandasamy, *Ms Militancy* 14).

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Her poem "Celestial celebrities" flows with the same strain as it celebrates the spirit of autonomy and nonconformity to the androcentric models of feminineness. Her "wild", "unrestrained and indiscriminate" (16) women prefer sexual freedom over cultural orthodoxy and never care for the diktats of an androcentric society. Being uncontrollable and "fond of running off and running away" (16), they follow "the jagged, moody course they chose for themselves" (16). These guiltless women are the voice of resistance and represent the force of female agency in subverting the patriarchal culture and undermining its misogynistic traditions. The patriarchal forces are terrified of strong minded and independent women who reject the traditional ideal of femininity. So, these "fallen women" are accused of deviation and transgression from the established path of patriarchy, hence, subject to alienation and expulsion from "heaven" – their true home.

The rivers here bear the names
Of fallen women exiled to earth
When the heavens found them

Too bloody hot to handle (16).

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The poem “Firewalkers” provocatively employs the myth of Draupadi, referred to as Diety Maari. She is portrayed as a vengeful and fierce woman seeking justice for herself. “The goddess is presented here as an angry, violent, avenging woman, an idol of fearful femininity, synonymous to Kali” (Patni 40). She represents the force of retribution for collective oppression and unspeakable violence suffered by the women of underprivileged class. The poem gives voice to feminist rage and empowerment while challenging the narrative of the patriarchal forces through the subversion of traditional myths. The poem depicts Maari as a symbol of female resistance and defiance in a world inflicted with the menace of objectification and dehumanization.

Maari had a one-point goal. Maari had a manic soul.
Maari made her men wage war, with her rapist’s blood
To drench her hair, and then, and then,
As these stories, go, Maari with her heart of stone,
Combed her hair with his left thighbone (22).

Another remarkable poem “Jouissance” expresses radical outrage while alluding to the myth of Ahilya being turned into stone by the curse of her husband Gautam Rishi. It talks about how the hegemony of patriarchy denies women agency and freedom of expression. Jouissance is a French term associated with the post-modernist theories propagated by Lacan, Barthes, and Kristeva, which means “orgasm”, and “total joy or ecstasy”. The poem retaliates to the power structures and simultaneously subverts the objectified and passive representation of women in the male-controlled discourse of female sexuality. It questions sexual politics related to the punishment for transgression. It exposes the discriminatory standards of a patriarchal society in the context of sexual pleasure. Meena Kandasamy challenges the patriarchal control over women’s desires and the colonization of their bodies.

An angry philosopher froze
His philandering wife: passivity
As punishment for promiscuity.
Rendered senseless, set in stone.,
She stared in unceasing surprise
As her sage husband toured
The world with his treatises on
What pleasure meant to women
And a powerpoint presentation
That showed close-up photos
Of her fixed phantom face (Kandasamy, Ms Militancy 26).

The poem “A Cunning Stunt” describes how the women are subserviently identified with their bodies. It exposes sexual politics and the “gendered language”. It explores the relationship between the relegation of the female body and the language of the man-dominated world. The language of the androcentric society does not consider them beyond their genitals. They are offensively described through their body parts. In a hegemonic setup, they are taken as being mere playthings in the hands of wanton men to gratify their sexual desires. Meena Kandasamy unabashedly attacks the androcentric ideals and various connotations & signifiers attached to the “vagina” in a hegemonic culture

In Conclusion, the nation has witnessed few women writers who are often recognized for their thoughts and knowledge. Most of them considering their strength attempted to explore the

women's problems and struggles to portray the inequality of gender in social, economical and moral perspectives. However, Meena Kandasamy is one particular writer who always attempted to give solutions to the problems and struggles of women in contemporary society. Especially her poetry gives solutions for the women characters by justifying both gender and caste discrimination. Through her works, she explored her experiences as a modern women poet along with the struggles of Dalit women in contemporary society. Kandasamy's contemporary and liberal thoughts project as she is not writing for the cause of money but the works awaken the readers about her insights to a cause which claims women's rights and equality. Thus, Meena Kandasamy's each line of her writing reflects like a power dynamics to claim identity as a woman.

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