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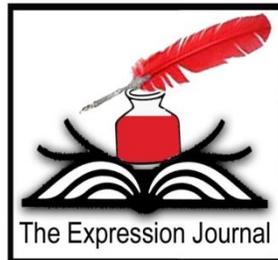


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**DECIMATION AND DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS IN
MEENA KANDASAMY'S *TOUCH*: A BRIEF ANALYSIS**

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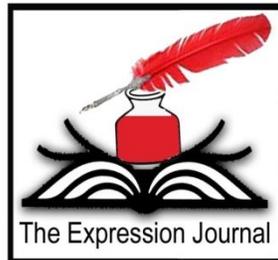
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Abstract

For ages dalits have defied logical interpretation and still it is an enigma, as the cliché goes, and the mysteries surrounding dalits pile up as time stealthily moves on. Since the time immemorial, dalits and doubly marginalised dalit women have been bearing the brunt of caste discrimination and gender discrimination in every nook and corner of the world. But the contemporary world and the contemporary literature is witnessing an extraordinary upheaval in the life of the dalits and dalit writers who want to fly freely in the open sky of liberty and freedom. Meena Kandasamy can be categorised in the forefront of such writers who have opened up areas in which previously forbidden or ignored by Indian writers. . This paper analyses the way in which dalit consciousness, subversion and decimation are brought out in the poems of Meena Kandasamy

Key-Words

Meena Kandasamy, Touch, Decimation, Dalit Consciousness, Marginalization.



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Dalit literature is uniquely Indian as it is a byproduct of an evil caste system that existed for many years in this country and it is not the story of fairies, sylphs and aerials, it is the real representation of the world. Constitution of India has abolished the caste system but it still lingers in many walks of life and in order to change the order of the society that is damaged by inequalities based on the caste, class and gender, dalit literature as a literary genre has established. Literature that arises as an outburst against casteism is 'Dalit literature'. There have been enormous writings on caste system by authors from different disciplines in India like Bama and Gunasekaran in Tamil, Suraj Pal Chauhan. Om Prakash Valmiki, Mohan Das Naimisharay, Kausalya Baisantri in Hindi, Urmila Pawar in Marathi. So today strong system of Dalit writings has been established and Meena Kandasamy is one among those writers and her writing comes from margins of the society dictated for many centuries. Meena Kandasamy advocates for Dalits and her numerous writings do not stop there but include love poems, poems championing the social rights of women, class and caste system and even those that represent daily matters with a power to evoke the emotions among the readers.

The development of Dalit literature marks an important juncture in Indian literary history. Writers alluringly give vent to the sufferings of a dalit community through autobiographical and experiential narratives. They used their education to address issues faced by Dalits and it was especially written by Dalit writers for Dalit and Non-Dalit readers. The fire of resistance from within and their strong efforts at cross examining

Dalit internalization of dominant power structures marks the gendering of Dalit literary discourse. According to Meena Kandasamy and other dalit writers, not even a single Dalit community is entirely free from inner contradictions, anomalies in precepts and practice. Dalits are doubly marginalized and they are oppressed and suppressed not only by a casteist structure but also by the society. Their works are filled with their painful experience of being untouchable and their struggles for creating a space and identity in this society. Assertion of self can be seen in Meena Kandasamy's writings and her works itself is an act of assertion for rights of dalits and justice hitherto denied to the Dalits and her works formulated a distinct and enduring space in the literary domain of English.

Consciousness is a constructed reality formed out of human experience and it is an activity of social perception, reflection and evaluation. It is closely linked with cultural symbols with which each person engages in their life-world and also related to the association or disassociation with the functioning of the society. Constructing consciousness is an unending process. Dalit literature imbibes dalit consciousness and the consciousness of a subordinated community is represented in and through its lived experience. The subordinated Dalit community is depersonalised and dehumanized.

Dalit consciousness acts as a potent weapon to transform a marginalized Dalit community into a strong but a free individual. Construction of Dalit consciousness usually happens in the situations of conflict, hostility, pain and tension and it is this struggle with heart-rending pain that comes through naturally in many works of Dalit writers. Anger and pain arising out of this pain flashes through the poetical works of Meena Kandasamy and especially her collection, *Touch* is dedicated to Dalit issues, superstitious beliefs and political intrusions in the society. Her collection can be called as a new tale of woe and worry of Dalit marginalised women community. The title "Touch" touches upon various aesthetic dimensions and human bonds of relationship or desire and it also focuses upon the firm divisions of caste which had accomplished thousands of Indians untouchable by birth and thus assigned them to a inferior level as their mere touch was considered to be polluting to people of the higher castes. *Touch* is a collection of eighty four poems and it is divided into seven categories: *Bring him up to worship you*, *Touch*, *Add some spice*, *To that more congenial spot*, *Lines of control*, *Slander in a slaughterhouse*, and *Their daughters*. Kamala Das who has written the foreword to *Touch*, has high praise for Kandasamy:

Older by nearly half a century, 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 . . . (*Touch* 7)

The anguish and anger of Meena Kandasamy against casteism is vital and her poems are neither comforting nor pacifying, but are unsettled and frenzy in nature. The poem "Touch", in her poetical collection *Touch* is a powerful political poem with Dalit consciousness that deals with the idea of untouchability in India and this poem defines

touch in multiple perspectives. In the socio-political context of India “Touch” has a label of hegemony and through her poems she repeatedly makes readers think about the inhumane situation, which is only confronted by the Dalit Community. The entire discourse of Brahmanical Hindu philosophy is challenged by Meena Kandasamy and she carefully and honestly highlights:

You will have known almost
every knowledgeable thing about
the charms and the temptations
that touch could hold.

But, you will never have known
that touch—the taboo
to your transcendence,
when crystallized in caste
was a paraphernalia of
undeserving hate. (36)

Thousands of dalits are humiliated and violently discriminated or subjugated by Brahmanically encoded hierarchies of caste and class system and therefore the writer sarcastically makes fun of the Hindu philosophy of non-dualism, adored by the people allaround the world, by pointing out the foundational binary or duality, between the touchable and the untouchable, between the upper castes and the outcastes. The poet releases fire through her powerful words coming out of her consciousness and boils it down to the bare facts that tell aloud the stories of many silences. The odor of untouchability is scattered in the popular scripture like *The Mahabharata* when a great saint Uttanga refused to drink water from a Nishad, the disguised Indra who said that he would prefer to death to accepting water from an untouchable. Eklavya was excluded from studying from the art of archery from the great guru Drona because of the one reason that he is from the lower caste. Shambuka in *The Ramayana*, Eklavya in *The Mahabharata* are some of the famous models to show the ill-treatment of untouchables in so called great Indian epics The oppression and suppression of the dalit community from time immemorial is brought out in Kandasamy’s poetry by touching upon the Hindu mythological story of *Ekalavan*, where she draws the readers’ attention to the discrimination faced by Ekalavya in the Mahabharata where Dhronacharya refuses to consider him as a student because Ekalavian belongs to lower caste rather than the Kshatrias :

You can do a lot of things
With your left hand.
Besides, fascist Dronacharyas warrant

Left-handed treatment.

Also,

You don't need your right thumb,

To pull a trigger or hurl a bomb. (2-8)

Another significant political poem that questions the philosophical teachings or ideology of Hinduism is "Becoming a Brahmin". The poet articulates powerful political statements and algorithm for converting a Shudra, lower caste into a Brahmin is presented here.

Begin

Step 1. Take a beautiful Sudra girl

Step 2. Make her marry a Brahmin.

Step 3. Let her give birth to his female child

Step 4. Let this child marry a Brahmin

Step 5. Repeat steps 3-4 six times

Step 6. Display the end product. It is a Brahmin.

End. (42)

Hatred towards the Gandhian principles is seen in the poem "Mohandas Karamchand" where his concept to name Dalit as "Harijan" is severely criticized and She opines that it is a purposeful attempt to incorporate the Dalits to the Indian Hinduism, where they are treated as lesser human beings. The thoughts and deeds of Gandhi are criticized by her because as a dalit writer she believed that his thoughts were inclined to the Hinduist philosophy and his preaching of equality never embraced the issues of Dalit community.

Gone half cuckoo, you called us names,

You dubbed as Pariahs-Harijans

Goody goody guys of a bigot god

Ram, Ram Hey Ram-boo (54).

Meena Kandasamy is an advocate of a caste pattern and the moral system. Her works are a series of self-dramatizations, each the result of a dalit consciousness of having to address the pressures of perception that attend poets, dalits, and poets who happen to be dalit women. The poet champions the borders on values that care for the dalit and there is least exaggeration to say that she is the poet who possesses profound concern for the marginalised community of the society. Meena Kandasamy has the courage to give voice to the oppressed and she talks about how dalits are outcast from the main streamline and not a part of actual society. The poet said she embraced her identity as a Dalit partly because there was no way of escaping it.

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