

Interrogating Structural Oppression in Meena Kandasamy's Treatment of Violence

1Lakshmi Haritha K. T, 2Prof. V. Nirmala

1Research Scholar, Department of English, 2Research Supervisor,
Department of English,
1Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidhyalayam,
1Tirupati, India

Abstract: India achieved freedom by non-violence; unfortunately, this exhilarating phenomenon has been forgotten by the people. The ideologies like non-violence and universal brotherhood with which the freedom fighters fought against the colonisers are ignored and neglected, which, as a result, have led the society to witness several kinds of violent acts. Among many depressing forms of violence, gender-based violence specifically against women is striking because it wounds the harmony between people, heightens the insecurities in their mindsets for the opposite gender, and damages the idealistic fundamentals of visionaries of the nation. Such incidents violate the peace among people and instigate the writers, who dream of a better and inclusive society, to write and condemn those tragedies. The exploration of certain incidents penned by Meena Kandasamy is the aim of this paper.

Key Words: Women, exploitation, gender, violence

Gender-based violence against women is a serious problem in any country and is an even more critical issue in a large democratic country like ours. It is a human rights violation and an extreme manifestation of gender inequity and subjugation, which reflects the highly chauvinistic mindsets of people. The violence can take several forms- physical, verbal, psychological, and sexual, which can have severe implications on the women's mental and physical health. Demand for dowry, child marriage, sati, honour killings, female infanticide, rape, marital rape, and the devadasi system are cultural forms of violence against women.

Despite several acts and laws proposed and brought into force by the government, there is a lack of implementation, which keeps the lives of women at risk every minute. The patriarchal mindsets of men always intend to humiliate the girl who rejects their proposal for marriage or love, and provokes them to attack the girl physically- acid attack, rape, abduction, etc., or mentally- morphing their pictures, posting their name and mobile number on social media platforms tagging them as call girls, eve teasing, commenting on the physic of women, all these affect the harmony among people and creates a void in the minds of women towards men.

The disheartening situation for a girl child or woman in our country is that they cannot be vocal about the injustice that happened to them and survive the judgmental stares of people in society. Most of the households either zip the mouths of women, never allowing them to speak out, or don't heed the words of those victims.

Meena Kandasamy, a Tamil-based writer, is an activist who reacts to the injustices through poetry. She challenges the mainstream literature and its themes, and advocates for the marginalised sections like women and Dalits. Her works depicted several incidents related to discrimination based on caste and gender, among a number of poems she has written few have been taken for this paper.

The poem entitled *Shame* from the debut anthology of Meena Kandasamy depicts the sad reality of a gang-raped girl who fails to gain any sympathy from the people because she is a woman. It is the victim who gets victimised time and again.

“Public prying eyes

Segregate her- the victim.

But the criminals have

Already mainstreamed-

Their caste is a classic shield.” (Touch, 58)

Along with chastity, the sixteen-year-old girl lost her peace and identity; she was seen as a potential vote bank, so politicians started declaring condolences, which could not wipe her tears and console her weeping heart.

Comfort seems remote—

A retreating fantasy... (Touch, 58)

Like vultures, people tried to eat her alive for their own selfish needs, which might compel her to succumb to eternal sleep.

In another poem titled *Mascarathe* the poet ironically tells the plights of prostitutes,

The last thing she does

Before gets ready to die

Once more, of violation, she applies the mascara. (Touch, 128)

We see how the body of a woman is subjectified here, even before the violation of the body, she has to prepare herself for the so-called man and as per his desires. The system of Devadasi and the atrocities they went through are the theme of this poem. The poet mocks at Gods for being silent when the temple dancer is harassed or molested by men from a higher caste.

While the former poems describe the poet's intuition towards the ill-treatment of victims, two other poems written by her show how assertively MeenaKandasamy reacts to the unjustifiable acts of men towards women.

Sangharsh Karna Haidelineates the memory of Jyothi Singh, who died following the heinous rape in New Delhi in 2012. The poet describes how the fighting spirit of the victim and the tragedy made people weep and unite to fight against the crime.

“of battling death and

Keeping him at bay

You became the star”

Rape Nation is a poem from her latest collection of poems, *Tomorrow, Someone Will Arrest You*. It's a reaction to a gang rape in Hathras, after which the victim and their family were deprived of meeting, and even the family was not allowed to cremate the girl's body properly.

“This has happened before, this will happen again”

Men consider women as objects, as they were told by Manu,

“It is the very nature of women to corrupt men. It is for this reason that the wise are never unguarded regarding women. — (213)”

Men from higher castes have raped a girl and left her to die in the forest were released by the system but the family of the girl was barricaded from performing the last rites for her dead body. The poet condemns the actions of the police and criticises society for being deaf to the pain of that family. She says-

“All women are harlots; all women are base;

All women seek is sex, all they shall have is rape.”(80)

In this poem, she talks about the victims of several social taboos,

“What does the fire remember? The screams of satis

Dragged into their husbands' pyres and brides burnt alive”

The four poems which are listed here address the several forms of violence that happen against women in the country. She voices the silenced voices around the country. The poet responds to the tragic incidents with so much intensity as she lashes out at every agency that is negligent and ignorant of the welfare of women, who are considered submissive to men.

It is literature that could educate people and bring a harmonious society into existence, poets, and writers through their media can inspire even an uneducated man, we see several peasants reciting poems from our mythological texts, it's evident that to learn and become wise literature is the vital medium, the boys should be taught to respect women and girls should be taught to be brave enough to voice out their problems and fight against vicious claws of patriarchy. When we can witness such equality, the refrain of the poet, “This has happened before, this will happen again”, can be used in a newer, positive, and empowering circumstance.

Reference:

Kandasamy, Meena, *Touch*, Peacock Books, Mumbai, 2006.

Kandasamy, Meena, *Tomorrow, Someone Will Arrest You*, Atlantic Poetry, London, 2023.

Chakraborty, Abin. *Venomous Touch: Meena Kandasamy and the Poetics of Dalit Resistance*.

http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3450:history-of-karamchedu-and-what-actually-happened