

ATTACKING THE ICONS OF INDIAN CULTURE WITH THE AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE: A READING OF MEENA KANDASWAMY'S SELECTED POEMS

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Abstract: The paper intends to study selected poems of famous Dalit woman writer Meena Kandaswamy and analyse how her politics of resistance is worked out in them. She is a young and vibrant poet who tries to rewrite the history and identity of Dalit through her revolutionary thoughts.

Key words: Dalit, Resistance, Gender, Brahmanical

Indian culture a great embodiment of Brahmanical thoughts, scriptures and life is reconstructed by the Dalit voices recently. Dalit is a post-independent thought. To resolve the caste discrimination which was existed in pre-independent India, our father of nation Mahatma Gandhi introduced the term. Even in this post modern condition, Dalit is an emerging voice in India.

Dalits adopted cultural, political and social resistance against the upper caste culture of India through their literature and other art forms. Literature becomes one of an effective mediums to reveal their identity in its full-fledged form. Sarankumar Limbale's autobiographical novel *Akkarmashi* explored the dark world of Dalit and got an international acceptance. The aesthetics of Dalit literary texts mainly focused on resistance. The so called ugly and evil things turns to be beautifully and the elements evoke aesthetic impact on reader. The beauty of goddess Parvati in Kumarasambava and the pictorial description of the beauty of a Sudra girl juxtaposed in the minds of readers. The Dalit writers tried to super impose beauty of Sudra girl to the beauty of the goddess in their texts.

Meena Kandaswamy as a women Dalit writer attacked the icons of Indian culture and Indian history through her poisonous language. Abin Chakraborty opines in his essay titled "Venemous Touch: Meena Kandaswamy and the Poetics of Dalith Resistance" that:

...sparing neither Gandhi nor Gods, her polemical, aggressive poetics scathingly dissects the complex matrix of subjugation which punctuates Dalit existence in India. In doing so, her poems sweepingly cover aeons of time as they deal not only with the myth of Ekalavya, which has remained a source of abiding inspiration for Dalit poets, but also with elements of modern history such as the atrocities of Karamchedu, in 1985. (35)

Beyond the boundaries of time and space, she attacks the evils as social, cultural, political and historical through her strong questions raised in her poems. The Indian identity which is created through brahmanical thoughts dismantled here and even she pulled Hindus into an identity crisis. Her poem *Advaita: The Ultimate Question*, questions the concept of Advaita in Hindu philosophy. She tells according to the concept of Advaita, she, as an untouchable outcaste also be a god. But the Indian consciousness could ever agree that. Then she asked as a final question whether the non-dualism is a true concept, her untouchable Atman and Brahmin Atman could ever be one. She throws these questions of non-dualism to the mind of Hindus and she provokes them to question their own scriptures, religion and even the nationality.

In the poem *Eklaivaan* she relates the myth of Eklavya to the modern society. Eklavya here becomes a symbolic representation of the victims of Dalit community. She consoles Eklavya that he could do so many things with his left hand and moreover he could not need the right thumb to pull a trigger or hurl a bomb. She presents new ways of reactions which are very powerful than old **armours**. Here the left hand also shows her support to communism which advocates equality and an organization worked for the upliftment of peripherals. She says that the new innovations of the world will help the Dalit to forget the old threats. In a short poem she presents a powerful idea. She recalls Eklavya who vanished silently in the history and tried to give a new life to him. Moreover, she assumes the Dalit are modern counterparts of Eklavya. Here Dronacharya is a symbolic representation of fascism in the modern society.

Meena Kandaswamy also tries to crush the each and every icons of Hinduism. Her hatred towards the Brahmanic creations of caste and their religious doctrines. In the very first line of the poem *The Gods Wake up*, she says that “Another worst thing with the gods is that...” here she indirectly announced that she could find so many worst things about the gods. She became an atheist who aggressively attacks the doctrines of religion. The aim of the life of a Brahmin is to attain swarga or heaven. For that they perform yagas, special offerings etc. she says in this poem that the heaven is a boring place, the gods always kept asleep even without having any dreams and the heaven is filled with the snores of thirty three million gods and goddesses. The gods silence toward the cruelties against the Dalit may tempt her to believe that all gods are sleeping always. The sound ‘Om’ is considered as sacred and most important spiritual sound in Dharmic religion. It is a Sanskrit origin word. The poet says it’s an obsolete one as a recurring mosquito buzz. Moreover the sound is an exclusive one which prevents the lower caste to spell. In the following lines she says that gods develop a sexual attraction towards the dead bodies. So they excited over the funerals and opened their eyes. She indirectly attacks the concept of Siva in Hinduism. The sound ‘om’ and ‘corpuses’ both are related to Siva. She explores the pain of subjugation and sufferings of Dalit through various elements of dominant Hindu culture. She giggles even spit out to the images of divinity in Hinduism.

She uses several myths of Hinduism to attack the Hindu culture itself. In a poem called *When the God Drank Milk* she says that she never look out the miracles done by Ganesha in the legends and all over the world. She does not approach such miracles scientifically and tries to negate them. But she wants to know whether Ganesha could consider a low caste woman as his sexual partner and having children in her and the silly girl could success in their relationship. She says:

Instead I am hunting for some
Silly girl’s bizarre secret, to know if
The son of Shiva had let himself
To be breastfed, to be suckled...
And if she, having tasted success
At his having tasted her...

Here lord Ganesha symbolically represents high caste men who denied low caste women to get married instead of sexually abused them. The inter-caste marriages are occurred, but she says never a low caste women becomes successful in such cases. She even hesitate to mention the word ‘low’ to describe the identity of a girl she used ‘silly’ instead.

In another poem titled *Reverence:: Nuisance*, she depicts the approaches towards the religion. In the official places even in the walls of secular institutions one could see the pictures of Hindu gods are painted. The people show their reverence and fear towards the pictures. They hesitates to spit on it. But the same pictures on the cheap roadside compound walls are crushed with betel juice and spits. Moreover sometimes the gods are covered with layers of smelly urine. She says that the people never give any importance to such picturization. They show their respect towards the place where pictures are drawn. They do not have any freedom to do any harm to the pictures in the walls of offices and other institutions. Like this the Dalit always obey the rules and regulations constructed by Hindus and show fake reverence towards their religious thoughts.

But in the roadside compound wall, with full of freedom they spit and urinate on the pictures of Hindu gods. They never expect a reaction from the pictures. She says that the gods deserves it. The gods are also aware of it.

Another important characteristic of the poem of Meena Kandasamy is she attacks the epics and puranas also. In her poem called *Princess in exile* depicts the condition of Sita in Ramayana. Here her female identity questions the pathetic condition of a woman whether she belongs to upper caste or lower caste. She says Sita took refuge in the asramam of Valmiki deprived of the acts of Rama, her husband. In other poem *Random Access Man* she pictured Rama as a fool, inactive, impassionate husband to Sita. He neglects all her feelings and emotions mostly her sexual appetite. He never shares his secrets or even his love. Kandasamy says:

...On cold nights he played Gandhi
to her waiting wife's body.
Denial aroused desire and
lust rolled on her breasts,
lust rode her hips....

Ravana is the first and last man who speaks out the name of her womb, shared all things secretly. She consumed all his deeds and whispers. And before she left him, she learnt all about love. Sita reacted to the denial of Rama as she had a relationship with Ravana. The author destroys all conventions and rules of an Indian woman who is depicted as a passive, ideal and obedient wife who others should seeks to imitate. Kandasamy indirectly says that if Sita explores her sexual appetite and enjoy Ravana's companionship she would be the heroine of present society. Kandasamy tried to dismantle the epitome of Indian woman through the depiction of her Sita.

In the poem *Traitress*, the poet depicts Shurpanaka as a neglected woman. She approached the two men- Rama and Ravana for having an intercourse. Her condition is very bad. She was widowed, forsaken totally alone. Sexuality here becomes an essential need for a human body to exist. So she needs a cult over country. Because of she explores her wish to have sex with two men they cut out her breast, nose and ears. They flattened all her projected organs and destroyed her femininity. They made the history to believe that she was ugly and a beast.

Taken to task, they told the world she was sharp-clawed,
long-nosed, big-buddha-eared, pot-bellied, cross-eyed,
with a potato-peeler voice, and a neck that grew at night.

From this two poems one could conclude that both the women, Sita and Surpanaka suffered the similar situation and one is successful in her attempt to have pleasure in her life and other one is destroyed totally. Here the successful one is an upper caste woman and the man behind her success is a low caste Dalit. The destroyed woman is a Dalit and the destroyers belong to high caste. By showing this disparity she writes another epic for Dalit. Beyond the caste and society, she gives importance to the human passions and emotions.

Through her powerful depictions, Meena Kandasamy target the readers to whom she wants to transform into a sensitive and sensible agent for social change. She made her poems unique in its unfamiliar content, its special means and mode of expression and humanist ideology. Her usage foul language, venomous sarcasm, sacrilegious ideology, vengeful expressions altogether make an aesthetics of resistance.

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