

# Dalit Consciousness and Search for Identity in Meena Kandasamy's Works

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to analyse how far "Literature" can be used as an "Empowerment Tool" in the context of the present scenario. It emphasizes the new role of dalit as a symbol of change with reference to Meena Kandasamy's works. It advocates the complex question of search for identity. Dalit writing is a post-independence literary phenomenon Dalit literature has its own significance. Dalit's were always considered as marginalized people, oppressed and others by the Indian Society. Inequality is the root cause of this marginalization. The word "Dalit" has originated from Sanskrit 'Dalita' which means 'oppressed' Dalits have various names in different parts of India, such as 'dasa', 'dasya', 'avarna', 'panchama' etc. There are varieties of women's cultures such as 'untouchables', 'harijans', 'weaker sections'. Meena Kandasamy's novels reveals consciousness for dalit's in India.*

**Keywords:** Dalit Consciousness, untouchability, sufferings, Identity

Dalit is the name given to the oppressed and downtrodden section of the Indian society. Modern dalit consciousness is sensitive to the treatment meted out to them and it is courageously voiced by Meena Kandasamy.

The marginalized section of the society that faces problem of every sort because lack of self sufficiently is the dalit community. The word Dalit in Marathi means, crushed, broken down and reduced to pieces. The postcolonial term 'subaltern' suits the Dalits of India because they remain subordinate to the privileged sections of the society since times immemorial. The subaltern voice is heard today in spite of it's interior status in every walk of life. The Black Panthers of America paved the way for the 'depressed classes' of India to begin the Dalit Panther Movement to Challenge the Caste hierarchy in our country Dalit consciousness now speaks out it's emotions and anguish. It expresses it's dissent on the existing social injustice and discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour and community.

Dalit Literature forms a distinct part of Indian literature. The voice of the Dalit is heard prominently after 1960 in the form of poems, short stories and autobiographies in almost all important slanguages. Dalit literature portrays the stark reality of the plight of the oppressed India class under the Indian Caste System. In the year 1992, a strong advocacy for awareness and transformation was done by the Ambedkar Sahitya Parishad by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thoughts and philosophy.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar opined that there can be division of labour but there should not be any division of the labourers. True! As the first division facilitates quality work within a short time. The second division leads to inequality and deprivation. Somewhere something ought to change to make human life easy and pleasurable. A feeling of universal brotherhood and oneness of humanity ought to be promoted to establish peace in this world. The famous saying goes: when there is beauty of character there is harmony in the family. When there is harmony in the family there is unity in the nation. When there is unity in the nation there is peace in the world. The so called oppressors must realize that hurting others causes double hurt to one's self. Let's not wait for someone to come and alleviate it! Let us be that someone.

Meena Kandasamy can be seen as someone who preferred to be the change that facilitates equality and fraternity. With her thunderous voice of poetry and fiction. Meena questioned the authority of one section of the society over the other.

Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy born in 1984 to Tamil parents, both university professors, is based in Chennai. Her first book 'Touch' was published in 2006. Two of her poems have won prizes in all India poetry competitions; her poetry has been published in various journals, including the little magazine, Kavya Bharati, Indian Horizons, Muse India and the Quarterly Literary Review, Singapore. Meena wrote a biography of Ayyantali, Kerala's foremost Dalit revolutionary in collaboration with M. Nisar. Her second volume of poetry was published in 2010. MS Militancy. Her novels 'The Gypsy Goddess' (2014), 'When I Hit You' (2017), 'Exquisite Cadavers' (2019).

The Dalit consciousness in literature grew rapidly only after the independence. This is because everyone, irrespective of caste and religion was encouraged to seek education only after the independence. So this paved the way for the people to think of their condition in the society. And then they started making notes about their condition and wrote about these in their works. This helped to way for a new genre of literature called the Dalit literature.

Professor Gangadhar Pantawane, defines the word 'Dalit' in Eleanor Zelliott's compilation as, "To me Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, and holy books teaching separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution." (P 268)

## The Gypsy Goddess (2014)

Kandasamy's 'The Gypsy Goddess' is the first novel describes a true-life incident. Treading the line between powerful fiction and fearsome critique, Kandasamy leads us through a rapidly modernizing India and, along the way, points out injustices of privilege, hypocrisies of

authority and the unforgivable politics of turning a blind eye. The novel comprised an account of the historical uprising of agricultural workers against their upper caste landlords. The kilvenmani landlords rule over a feudal system the forces peasants to break their backs in the fields and suffer beating as a punishment.

The present reluctant novel fictionalizes the events that led up to the attack a long standing battle between powerful landlords and the communist party who organized resistance against landowners, demanding between wages and the working conditions.

### MS. Militancy (2010)

Kandasamy's second volume of poems which contains forty-one poems. Kandasamy retells the Tamil Hindu mythology through a feminist perspective, for an instance in her poetic lines: she provides a background for the two mythical women. She writes about: Sita and Shoorpanaka. Kandasamy's Sita doesn't follow the patriarchal rules and regulations created by the Hindu religion. MS. Militancy indicates Kandasamy's protesting voice against the downtrodden woman subjugation. Dalit author Limbale draws attention towards another prevalent view point in his writings. He comments:

The humanity of human beings is Satyam, Shivam; Sundaram is a foolish aesthetic concept. There is no truth and beauty in the world comparable to that which is found in human beings. Therefore, it is essential to discuss the equality, liberty, justice and fraternity of human beings. [Limbale 19]

### Conclusion

Meena Kandasamy's works shares the discourse of modernity, which addresses issues concerning contemporary society and its conditions dalits realized that education, combined with experience can create wonders in the lives of people by making people realize that empowerment comes only where there is enlightenment and unity. This realization helped them to break the shackles of animosity and struck the chord of compromise which helped them to capture the levers of Government power. Thus, Kandasamy's works ends on a note enlightenment that united they stand divided they fall.

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