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Depiction of Female Suppression and Issue of Caste Discrimination in Meena Kandasamy's "Touch"

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Abstract: Throughout her literature, Kandasamy keeps her focus on caste eradication and the problems of women-folk. She is immensely praised as the first woman poetess in India who is composing Dalit poetry in English literature. Through her poetic corpus, Kandasamy voices out an honest and committed feminist dialogue highly pregnant with ideas, images and compositions from the past and tries within each of her re-readings to substantially raise the voices of the voiceless women that have been culturally neglected, muffled or misinterpreted. Irrespective of composing verses in diverse subjects, Kandasamy prefers to compose poems on caste discrimination and problems of women in the society. In her writings, she pours her emotions and experiences felt by Dalit community. Currently she is enjoying her happy and secured life amidst the group of elite and learned people. But she fails to forget high-caste people who are responsible for the wretched life of her community.

Keywords: Dalit, women-folk, caste, English Language, society, anthology, gender, verses.

Frequently, literary works of Dalit written by Tamil women are victimized by the men-folk in the role of husbands, fathers, sons etc. Most of the women-folk in Dalit community are the victims of male-domination. Unfortunately, in Dalit community, there is want of Dalit or

Feminist Movement, which may support women-folk. Kandasamy, through her literature, reveals the bitter realities of Dalit community in the big cities like Chennai. She was side-lined from the social paradigm only because she is a woman from Dalit community in the Tamil region, even though, she has the natural talent and exhibited her talent through her writings and fruitful usage of the English language. She is very proficient in voicing through English literature which she harnesses as a potent weapon to hammer critics and also to justify her philosophy. It is a matter of surprise that many students from Dalit community are facing tough time in acquiring effective education and securing admission in English medium schools. The main reason behind is that, the language English is the symbol of power and privilege, so it is not smoothing comprehensible for the people who are in lower strata of the society. Financially weak and lower caste people would be automatically expelled out of the boundaries, because the elite class people want to enjoy the privilege of having monopoly in the process of policy making. Through one of her interviews, Meena Kandasamy reveals that she has opted to compose poetry out of sheer passion, as it is expressed through the language and language is the best medium to exhibit one's authority and suppression. The verses of Kandasamy has the power to face the language oppression and discriminations. By using language as a medium of expression, Kandasamy exposes the way women in Dalit community are treated in the society.

The women-folk belong to upper caste community as well as the women folk belong to lower caste community—both are suffering from the gender discrimination, but the predicament of women-folk from Dalit community is far worse as compare to the women-folk from the upper caste community. A woman from Dalit community is considered as the "other" even amongst women-folk of all castes. It is also a matter of

fact that the Dalit women become victim of gender discrimination from the men-folk of the same caste to which they belong. Frequently, they suffer from domestic violence and also deprived of their fundamental rights. They are tolerating such atrocities that they turned to be lame and submissive victims who are unable to protest against the injustice inflicted on them. The evil of gender discrimination is omnipresent and prevalent in the contemporary Indian society.

Meena Kandasamy champions the ideology of the gender equality in her anthology of the poems entitled "Touch" by dissecting issue of female suppression and voicing her concerns about the same. She has made a verbal attack on the social evil wherein systematic suppression of women-folk is done. With the help of her sharp arguments and polemical method of writing she tries to expose the issue of the gender equality.

Kandasamy not only portrays Dalit women as a victim of the lust of upper caste men, but some Dalit women are also shown exhibiting their revolting attitude against the atrocities inflicted upon them and upholds the cause of gender equality. Kandasamy lashes the society, also, for not considering a woman as a woman. The patriarchal society identifies a woman in the role of a sister, a wife, a mother and also an image of goddess, but fails to acknowledge her as a woman.

Kandasamy is fully aware that composing the verses in English has more accessibility to approach to readers in every nook and corner of the world. She chooses to compose the poetry in English because she believes it is the regal language belongs to the White man and controlled by the elite class people. She also believes that English language comprises of certain words from her mother tongue.

The anthology "Touch" is a sensation and has acclaimed by many critics. The touch is the prime taboo that is fundamental in the society and is affecting many women in the form of

gender and caste. Kandasamy has exposes it very truthfully and brilliantly in her anthology. When a person from low caste touches a person belongs to upper caste, in such case it cause ruckus in the society. With regard to the Brahmin caste, it results to create water, God and their dynasty to be impure.

There are a handful of people who are inflicted with serious or spreadable diseases, they would like to show their gratitude towards God because of one last time would be visible in the Prayers of Meena Kandasamy. Her poem depicts the partial recovery or ten-day of the disease typhoid. People in general will not be able to accept or tolerate to notice this diseased person. Kandasamy has exposed it ironically with consequences. These lines can be worth quoting from her poetry: "An irked Rajput surged forth, and smote the untouchable with an iron rod. He, worrier cast lion couldn't tolerate encroachment". Number of stories are there which are exposed by Kandasamy, some of them are being reported while others are left unreported or rejected. The hidden past and present traced back into the limelight for the readers to convince them about the inhumane situations that are experienced by the people of underprivileged class. These writings are also preserved for the coming generation. The verses that are composed by Kandasamy would reveal about the terrible situations and wails of Dalits.

The verses of Kandasamy can be treated as an encyclopaedia that comprises of only woeful inventories. It is a matter of surprise that the untouchable people become touchable for the upper caste people when comes to fulfill their needs like menial jobs and lusty requirements. In the poem entitled "Narration", Kandasamy composes following lines:

"I'll weep to you about
My landlord, and with
My mature gestures-
You will understand.
The torn sari, disheveled hair

Stifled cries and meek submission
I was not an untouchable then."

The poem "Shame" deals with the life of women after she is sexually exploited by a group of men. This sufferer will not even attract the sympathy of the people because she was a Dalit woman. As such, this victim is the one who was exploited again and again.

"Public's prying eyes

Segregate her-the victim.

But, the criminals have

Already mainstreamed-

Their caste is a classic shield."

The woman who was the victim of gang rape would not have any alternative to cope up with the grief other than to initiate the extreme action in her life. She becomes more vulnerable to this sort of inhumane torture, because of her caste, which compels her to be a victim of sexual exploitation. Food and water are the fundamental and most essential things for any human beings and for Dalit also to survive and struggle. It is very unfortunate thing that the marginalized class actively responsible for cultivating food grains, but they are deprived of a morsel of food. Meena Kandasamy emphatically states that scarcity of water for Dalit people because such low class people are not permitted to drink clean water. The water they compelled to use at their homes is impure because buffalos used to take bath, urinate and do bullshit in that water.

"Buffalo Baths. Urine. Bullshit

Drinking Water for the Dalits

The very same Pond". (from 'Liquid Tragedy: Karamchedu 1985')

"Touch" summarises the aesthetics of agony, but also a strong aesthetics of protest. Lines in her poems are original just because she is herself. Her words sprouted as if from a deep-rooted silence within.

"Touch" has been progressively acknowledged as a political anthology due to the polemics touch offered by Kandasamy to her

verses. She is frank, honest and harsh. Through her poem "Dignity", she cries, "don't surpass/our rightful share of dignity". It can be called an anthology of passionate poems handling the theme of binary opposition of oppressor and oppressed. In her poem "Lines addressed to a warrior", Kandasamy challenges, "Come/colonise me". She addresses to the so-called coloniser and asks to invade her "inner space" and "Capture/every territory". Her verses deal with the truth and experience; her genuine sociological predicament. She reveals the several faces of women-hood in her poetry- lover, mother, wife, middle aged matron. She has framed woman as an unflinching pursuer of the nature of psychological phenomenon behind masculinity and femininity. Unlike most of the women poetesses in India, Kandasamy has adroitly harnessed the language to express her sincere feeling and honest experience.

Conclusion:

Thus, Kandasamy's verses indicate the arrival of fresh era in Indo-Anglian literature. Her sensibility is extremely feminine which pronounces without hesitations the hurts it has got in an indifferent and majority man-made world. Thus the verses of Kandasamy provide new and varied scenario of life with different shades—dark and light as well, but inclination towards the dark shades are more in her poetic corpus. Kandasamy is more contemplative and spontaneous in her portrayal of life experience.

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