

A Perspective Glass Portraying Distinct Subaltern Ache in Meena Kandasamy's Poems

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Abstract

World is racing towards our ultimate master called wealth. People mask their identity with the social status to be respected, but they fail to recognize even their neighbors. In this fast-moving age, there are people who are rendered without any agency by social status. We label them as margins of the society. The ache of emancipating themselves from the clutches of poverty makes them unable to rejoice any societal status. In addition to that people look down them as menial creatures neglecting even the basic rights they are to opt. Meena Kandasamy, Indian poet and activist, shoots with her powerful words piercing through the lives of such marginalized people. Her poems are not only verses but also the celestial arrow tearing the hearts of what is left unnoticed and marginalized. This kind of literature proves the rage to reflect shame that bears on the same society that runs to hold the hands of wealth and meaningless status.

Thus, literature voices for those unspoken pain enabling the society to envision the cruelty of poverty. The treasure of holding such pain is not only to understand but also to step ahead for the betterment for such lives.

Keywords: Meena Kandasamy, subaltern, rage, shame and meaninglessness.

Introduction

Society is tangled inseparable with the ultimate master called wealth. We are running to catch hold of wealth and its need remains not pregnant. The governance of money by man has changed to the governance imposed by money on man. In such a race we are socially discriminated based on the hierarchy we build among ourselves. One such group, socially cornered based on power of wealth are called Subaltern. On one hand they have their ache for living. On the other the urge to be treated equally bares their ache to live that they decide death could be better than living with their identity. We label them as 'subaltern' and the very name could make them stand away from the normal crowd (i.e.) cornering by their position in the world. Meena Kandasamy, a poetess from such marginalized community, speaks out through her writings with such a rage and reality to open our minds to the ache that we knowingly and unknowingly impose upon such lives.

Can Birth Become A Curse?

Can birth become a curse? Yes, when we peer deeper into this question we could understand that, it could be. Birth becomes curse when we are barred from any rights, while

others are enjoying the same. It could become when we are treated as a menial creature and the jobs we do are identified as socially disgusting. It could also happen when our inability to voice against such discriminations increases just because others have their power of caste and money to stamp our basic feelings. Moreover, it could happen when all these are important, and nothing is considered even with the basic instinct of Humanity.

Subaltern are alienated from the society and denied the means by which they have a voice only in their society. There is a silent war between people, of which subaltern are killed by ignoring them as human. Meena Kandasamy portrays the basic rights denied for their birth and the horrible result of claiming anything they wish:

*“The pot sees another noisy child
The glass sees an eager and clumsy hand
The water sees a parched throat slaking thirst.....
..... dhanam sees a world torn in half.
Her left eye, lid open but light slapped away,
The price for a taste of that touchable water”
- One-eyed*

Sense of Pity

A sense of pity develops through the lines that breaks the reality they face. The world torn into half which proves their sense of alienation and the gap between them fills nothing more than caste and wealth. Not only the world is torn into half but the Humanity is torn and the gap still remains a gap.

People are left without any social agency and their inability to voice for their rights and needs increases. The poet says *‘ours is a silence that waits. Endlessly waits’*. For their silence would pave way for more and more discriminations. They are deprived of their own wish.

*And maybe we will
Almost fall in love.....
..... and the scars on my hands
And perhaps lift my skirt.....
Before he learns the greater horrors,
I owe him the truth of me-
So I will say to him the truth of me-
“I went to school”
- An Angel Meeting Me*

There may be no great shock to love a man but the love that wants to open its wings fears the horrors that might be witnessed. The horror of birth and caste, which has created completely unsecure living. The cruelty of such marks in the body gives us the absolute hypocrisy. The body along with the wish to learn is tortured unkindly. The scar is not only for the body but also for the soul that has wishes to explore.

Suffering of People of “Low Origin”

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People of such low origin are not free from the clutches of poverty. On the other hand they don't have time and space to think of their status or agency because they are worried about their first meal. Most of the time their dream of having good food remains a nightmare.

*“Her famished tongue feasted on dreams
And she catered to its carvings--.....
..... a son was born, he was fed
And he learnt to feed
Soon he was caught eating mud.....
..... a son inheriting her tongue.....
..... She saw in his cloudy mouth
The truth of three worlds-
Sand everywhere, everything
Turning to sand.*

- *Eating Dirt*

They teach their tongue how to become used to the dreams of their eating great food, which seems cruel than their hunger. A child too inherits his mother's tongue experiencing indomitable hunger. The act of eating mud could be tremendously bad for us, but they have to satisfy the hunger some way or the other. They work for us but the consideration that we give for their hunger is a less human act. We turn to beast satisfying our own needs at the pain of others. The poem ends with the note that 'sand everywhere, everything turning to sand' which gives us the nature of living. We wish for sand and we at last turn into sand. In this temporary living we fail to witness human as human but treat them as invertebrate creatures.

Meena Kandasamy's Portrayal of Life

The yearning of living is diminished by preying upon these people. We plant the thought of dying could be far better than living. They are branded to be poor and their solace is sought in nothing. Meena Kandasamy has given one such portrayal of life becoming nothing worthy in the eyes of a Subaltern.

*“The last thing she does
Before she gets ready to die
Once more, of violation,
She applies the mascara.....
..... Somewhere
Long ago
In an
Untraceable
Mangled
Matrilineal
Family tree
Of temple of prostitutes,
Her solace was sought.....
..... Fighting her case,*

*Providence lost his pride.
Her helplessness doesn't
Seduce the Gods.
And they too
Never learn
The Depth of her Dreams."*

- Mascara

The depth of the poem underlines the fact of others being vulnerable to prey upon them. They ache of emancipating themselves kills them slowly. In this poem her solace is being sought as a prostitute but even then, she dies everyday of violation. The depth of her dreams is not understood by others and they forget they are one of the reasons behind such violation. They treat them unkind and tear their soul through violation. When their physical need is satisfied, they once again treat her as subaltern. Her profession seems disgusting only after those men's need gets fulfilled. Thus, the poet implies her thought saying the providence has lost its pride before her condition, her helplessness doesn't seduce Gods while it did with all other guys and Gods too never understand the depth of her dreams.

Poverty

The money that understood people needs fails to understand the shackles it wears on poor and it also doesn't understand those who own them. The society has adjusted according to money and in today's scenario money owns all. We are like puppets dancing to its tunes. One such slapping words of Meena Kandasamy, vividly gives us what man is marching towards or what is the destiny we are travelling to.

*"My school bud, he works hard.
He slog. He makes money.
He grew dam rich.
He go to da temple, where
His po' ol' folks ain't allowed.....
..... Priest with ash and holy smoke
Come to him, give extra blesses for
A cool crisp fifty my bud gives.
He stand there and stare,
Stare hard at the Gwad;
His first time in the temple.
Then my just blessed bud, he asks me:
Say, ya, how much da "Luxmee" cost?"*

- For Sale

Our Dedication to Money

This poem makes us feel shy of our own dedication to money and not to the person as a human being. When a person is accompanied by money he is respected but as a human he is still separated and treated unworthy. We open our eyes only to money otherwise we remain blind. This real nature of man bears a shame upon our living. When a subaltern is respected only for the

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money he finds even God as an object exhibiting no spiritual omnipotence. When a man can be brought using wealth why not God, which is the epitome of man's greedy nature and God's blindness to all other Subaltern lives.

Conclusion

Subalternity or being a subaltern is more painful than what we could imagine. The pain of cursed living could less be understood unless we live as them. They await a change not outward but in the soul thought of accepting them as they are and treat them with respect. We all run after the ultimate leader called wealth. We are actually subaltern under such wealth. We do not open our eyes to that leader but build class structure among ourselves. This narrow mindedness pulls the subaltern down again when their caste or poverty is noticed. Their inability to voice for their rights increases when we first regard them as subaltern, but not as human.

We are subaltern because of our impaired thoughts. The fear of our power, position, other people and sometimes ourselves, restricts us to open our humanness to poor. We wear our meaningless status and take pride in treating others with disrespect, thinking that all these are essential to hold our prestige.

An individual is 'nothing' when we remove all his attributed identities. This nothingness brings out nothing. If it brings out something out of that nothingness (whether positive or negative) we must be able to recognize what will makes sense and what helps people in the betterment of their lives.

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