

Social Injustice and Subaltern Awareness in the Poetic Realm of Meena Kandasamy

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Abstract

This research article at the outset, explores the sufferings of injustice and inequality on subalterns from “cradle to grave” done to them. Among all Dalit woman writers, Meena Kandasamy expels unique in her poetic realm she is the fiercely representative, who vigorously voiced her thoughts regarding observations and experiences of the subalterns on the caste – based dystopian Indian land. Her poetry deals with the antithetical narratives about the past, present and future problems faced by the subalterns. This paper neatly epitomizes the success of Meena Kandasamy for contextualising the original picture of picture of growth, decline, culture and liveliness of the subalterns in her poems. And finally, this research article ends up with the statement that Meena Kandasamy skilfully traces the painful sufferings of the subalterns’ right from their infancy, who rebelliously aroused and spoke her thought about the subalterns.

Keywords: Meena Kandasamy, subalterns, injustice, inequalities, caste, dystopian, antithetical, narratives, sufferings, rebellious, infancy.

“Justice consists not in being neutral
Between right and wrong but in finding
out the right and upholding it, wherever
found against the wrong”

Theodore Roosevelt.

From the origin of the world’s creation, the word ‘justice’ inhabits the special position like a ‘pearl’, which never changes it in its standard quality even when it is thrown into the pit of stagnant water. Justice as a ‘pearl’ remains constant right from first born ancient inhabitants “Adam and Eve” to present post-modern mechanical figures of the world. As Aristotle comments:

“The only stable state is the one
which all men are equal before
the law of man-made and creator”.

“Justice” is a pure state of thing, where people converts its pureness to be faded by their inconstant state of unethical mind and heart. In the saying of Confucius:

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“Justice is like a Northstar, which
is fixed and all the rest revolve about
it”

The act of being justice in one’s life is considered to be the divine state of living. It is occupied in every human’s deep heart, that one must bring it out and make use of it in a correct absolute path for good yearnings and happenings. By days gone, the growth and development of the world has caused society to become more secularized. Man with his egotistical attitude and behaviour made people to move away from traditional belief and custom of justice and equality. They have developed a sense of owning and belongingness which blocked the act and sense of justice and equality.

Justice and act of equality in a person will not see through his physical appearance, educated mind, his occupation and as well as his position in the society. It is definitely seen only through the man’s attitude and behaviour towards life and its circumstances with the flavours of unbiased, moralised empirical mind. From ancient period onwards, certain group of people begin to burn and bury the morals of justice and universal equality and started sowing the seeds of malignant prejudice philosophy, which dangerously grew a tree with fruits of injustice, inequality, self-centredness, jealousy, inhuman behaviour. The man reaped these fruits of evilness and began to fill their heart and mind with the malignant behaviour, where he grew their heirs by making them follow these evil concepts from one generation to the next. As the result, it must be understood that every single man in the modern world breathe the air of injustice and inequality. The words of Thomas Jefferson’s say:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that
all men are created equal, that they are endowed
by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,
that among this life, Liberty and the pursuit of
happiness. Experience demands that man is the only
animal, which devours his own kind, for I can apply
no milder term to the general prey of the rich on the poor.”

The words of Thomas Jefferson describes that all men are created by God equally and they all were bestowed with infinite natural resources and rights of justice, equality, peace, dharma, love, freedom and happiness, etc., but man with his egocentric self-serving departments began to subjugate, suppress other man who is lower to his position, status, color, class, creed and caste. The self-centred philosophy of man followed all over the world still today making the world as a land of dystopia. When it is thought of Indian caste system and its followings from ancient period is definitely to agree that India is a dystopian land. The caste system believed to be unique in Indian society. This social divisions of caste system in India is accepted permanently tenanted in Indian land and this rule of social divisions on caste is framed by “Dharmashastras”, which is formulated by man not by God. Dharmashatras are basically

law books composed by upper-class self-centred brahmins to insist caste rules on subalterns such as Dalits, Shudras in order to save their upper class higher status in the society.

The four categories of Varna system are based on their characters, behaviour =s and position in life, but egocentric persons to save their heirs and their generation, they permanently took over the higher status in the name of caste, Dharmashastras, Manusmriti, and also through Vedas. Subalterns in India are called as Dalits, Shudras, and suppressed, Untouchables and Harijans. They are marginalised, subjugated suppressed and bombarded every second in their life socially, economically, and politically. Even after caste discrimination has been declared offence under article 17 of Indian constitution, they still suffer in the hot tar of untouchability, who were socially weak, economically suffers and politically downtrodden. In the midst of these traumatic grieving, many writers raised like a fountain among the subalterns, who contextualized their subaltern environment, aestheticism, and their empowerment in social, economic and political status, They are called “other”.

At first, writers of subaltern literature wrote their experience of dangerous, heart touching painful torments, suppressions and hurting in their life. In between, their autobiographies evolved, which unmasked their own subaltern sensibility of their subjugated life. Later, they explosively explored their boldness and act revolution through their writings in their literature. They started raise their voice against the injustice and inequalities made by the upper class communities. They are Namdeo Dhasal, Om Prakash Valmikki, Anant Rao, Baburao Bagul, Jatin Bala, Ajay Navaria, Leeldhar Mandhol, Imayam, Kanwal Bharati, Manoranjan Byapari, Suraj Paul Chaudhan, Raja Dhale, Aravind Malagatti, and Devanur Mahadeva. These writers rose up with their own stories, pains and they all narrated the agony of a subaltern’s life.

And also, there arises subaltern Dalit woman writers, who are the modest set of low castes, who have been doubly marginalised as a woman in male chauvinistic India and as subaltern women in the low caste society. Women writers begin to show their resistance in the rebellious way through their writings. For these women writers, pen is the mighty sword to rebel against their torturous life in the bowl of hot soup. Many woman writers such as Baby Kamle, Shantabai Kamble. Urmila Pawar, P. Sivakami, Gogu Shyamala, Anita Bharati, Dr. C.S. Chandrika, Meena Kandasamy. Their writings mirror their humiliating pitiful torment experiences in their in their life. Among these women writers, Meena Kandasamy, a modern young woman, who hot headedly rebel at the damaged society through her poems, vilifying the abided social divisions of the subaltern groups made by the egocentric people. She came into light as the exponent of anti-caste or caste annihilation movement. Her literary involvement and as a socio-political activist bring forth the issues of marginalization of the subaltern group, with the revolving themes of sexual harassment, gender discrimination, casteism, racism. Being a rageful rebellious woman, Meena principally makes her poem revolve around the hot themes such as freedom of the rape victims, Dalit women, temple prostitutes (Devadhashis) and brown women. As a subaltern Dalit modern emerging writer, Meena authentically unearths the

dehumanized state of Dalits and their harsh portrayals by the upper class communities. She sternly stood up as the protestant, revolutionist and as a rebel to discover the Dalit identity and to rewrite by contextualizing the subaltern environment with antithetical narratives against the subaltern injustices and inequality which is inflicted on subaltern as delineated in her poems.

Meena Kandasamy, through the genre of poetry, used it as platform to voice the unheard voices of the subalterns. Through her poetry, she discloses the unrevealed desires and passions of the low caste people under the predomination of upper class privileged community. In an interview with “Sampsonia Way Magazine” Meena said:

“My Poetry is naked, my poetry is in tears,
My poetry screams in anger, My poetry writhes
In pain. My poetry smell of blood, my poetry
salutes sacrifices. My poetry speaks like my
people, my poetry speaks for my people”.

Meena is also called ‘Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy’ who was born on January 1, 1984 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. She is a poet, writer, activist and translator. Her works point out the humiliations of upper class community, linguistic identity and feminism. Meena is the youngest modern Indian poet of this twenty first century. In the year 2013, Meena has published two collections of poetry namely, “Touch” (2006) and “Ms. Militancy” (2010). Two of her poems have won the accolades in all Indian poetry competitions. Apart from her literary works, she voices about various contemporary political issues relating to caste, corruption, violence and women’s rights. Although, Meena writes in English, she also translated the works of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and Tamil Elam writers such as Kasi Anandhan, Cheran and VIS Jayapalan into English. This research article aims to analyse the poetry of Meena Kandasamy as an iconic protestant and dalit representative, who outrageously delineates the exasperation and disgruntlement towards social injustice and inequality forced on subalterns, whose poetry is the antithetical narratives towards these subaltern issues rose out from the voice of Meena Kandasamy as an angry young woman.

In the poem entitled *One-Eyed*, Meena, as an angry young woman floods out her counter narratives in behalf of the voiceless Dalit victim ‘Dhanam, who was brutally harassed by snatching her one eye-sight for drinking water in the glass that is only meant for the upper class. In the voice of Meena rightly says:

The poet sees just another noisy child
The glass sees an eager and clumsy hand
The water sees a parched throat slaking thirst
But the teacher sees a case of medical emergency
The school sees a potential embarrassment the press
Sees a headline and a photo feature. Dhanam sees a

World torn in half her left eye, lid open but light
slapped away, the price of taste of that touchable water.”

Meena touches upon Hindu mythology in the poem *Ekalaivan*, where she uprooted the issue of caste discrimination in the great epic *Mahabharatha*. She points out the injustice meted out to Ekalaivan on the basis of casteism. Guru Dhronacharya rebuffed to train archery to Ekalaivan as he belongs to low caste rather than upper caste. Her explosive counter narrative reflects in her poem as:

“You can do a lot of things
With your left hand. Besides ,
Fascist Dronocharyas warrant
Left-handed treatment, also You
Don’t need right thumb to pull
A trigger or hurl a bomb.”

In the poem *Mohandas Karamchand*, Meena raise rebellious question against Gandhi for naming low caste people as “Harijans”. She severely condemns Gandhi, as he is the follower of brahmanic standard, he never understands the ideals of low caste. This poem is a stinging criticism on Gandhi and never accepts him as a father figure, as he has done a great injustice to subalterns by naming them as ‘Harijans’.

“ Who? Who? Who?
Mahatma, sorry no
Truth, Non-violence
Stop it, enough taboo
Gone half cuckoo, you
You called as names,
You dubbed as Paiahs – ‘Harijans’
Ram, Ram, Ram... boo
Don’t ever act like a Saint”.

The poetic lines of Meena erupt the hot lava of words from the Valvano towards Gandhiji for naming the dalits as Harijans.

Meena Kandasamy forces out her oppositions through her antithetical narrative in her poetries to shower light and empower the privilege of the subalterns. She provides the hard-hearted kick and punch to the upper caste man made dharma shastras and also emerged as the propagandist of the voiceless women, whose anger not only burning in the heart Meena but also in the other women. She ferociously ought against the injustice and inequality meted out to the subalterns. She contextualised the disgrace, pity, humiliation, subaltern environment,

language through her poetry creating awareness through the counter narratives to become a daring and courageous subaltern not as a victim of suppression.

To conclude, the struggle of the subalterns and their existence in the caste stricken land from ancient time to present is existing in the land of India. Meena Is not just protesting against the caste oppression but also contextualising her subaltern identity. Her writing uproots and articulates the wholesome emotions, pains deprivation, captivity, humiliation, anger and their agonizing survival with oppressed taboos. Meena through her poetry challenges both the caste-politics and Dalit patriarchy, and makes her listeners and emphasizes them her rebellious thoughts, which explore the vulnerable condition of an oppressive social structure which made subaltern as scapegoats without considering their dignity and self-respect.

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