

A Critical Study of the Representation of the Intersectionality Between Caste and Gender in Meena Kandasamy's "When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" and "The Gypsy Goddess"

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the nuanced portrayal of caste intersectionality with gender in the literary works of Meena Kandasamy, a prominent contemporary Indian writer. Kandasamy's narratives provide a rich tapestry through which to examine the multifaceted experiences of individuals navigating the complex social structures of caste and gender in India. Through a close analysis of selected texts, this study aims to elucidate the ways in which caste and gender intersect to shape identities, power dynamics, and social hierarchies. Drawing on intersectional feminist theory and postcolonial perspectives, the paper explores how Kandasamy's characters negotiate and resist the oppressive forces of caste and patriarchy, while also highlighting the complexities and contradictions inherent in their struggles for agency and liberation. By engaging with Kandasamy's literature, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between caste and gender in contemporary Indian society, shedding light on the lived realities of marginalized individuals and communities.

Keywords: Caste, Gender, Intersectionality, Violence

1. Introduction

Caste and gender in India represent two fundamental dimensions that intricately shape the social fabric and lived realities of individuals. The intersectionality of caste and gender unveils the entangled nature of multiple systems of privilege and oppression, unearthing the complex dynamics embedded within Indian society. The discourse surrounding caste and gender assumes critical significance due to its capacity to foreground the multifaceted challenges encountered by marginalized communities, particularly women, as they navigate the intersecting structures of power. By interrogating the interplay between caste and gender, scholars, activists, and policymakers can deepen their comprehension of and address the deeply entrenched inequalities and discriminatory practices that persist. This discourse acts as a catalyst for societal transformation by contesting deeply rooted norms and structures that perpetuate caste-based discrimination and gender-based oppression. By amplifying the voices and experiences of those situated at the intersections of caste and gender, the discourse fosters a more inclusive and equitable society that

strives to dismantle hierarchical systems and provide equitable opportunities for all. Furthermore, the discourse on caste and gender facilitates the acknowledgment and deconstruction of the inherent privilege associated with dominant caste and gender identities. It encourages critical self-reflection and fosters a culture of allyship, cultivating solidarity among diverse communities in their collective pursuit of social justice and equality. Moreover, this discourse serves to recognize and dismantle the marginalization experienced by oppressed groups, particularly Dalit women, whose voices and narratives have historically been suppressed. By centering their experiences and struggles, the discourse on caste and gender contributes to their empowerment and the assertion of their rights.

In conclusion, the discourse on caste and gender in India assumes vital scholarly importance for comprehending the intricate dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression. It enables the identification of intersecting forms of discrimination and provides a platform for challenging prevailing social norms, advocating for marginalized communities, and advancing the realization of a more inclusive and equitable society. Engaging in this academic discourse represents a significant step towards dismantling deeply entrenched inequalities and propelling transformative social change. Introduction The intricate interplay of caste and gender in Indian society manifests as an intersectional framework that significantly influences the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities. This research paper aims to investigate the multifaceted dynamics of caste and gender intersectionality, elucidating the distinct challenges confronted by individuals and communities within this paradigm. The caste system, deeply ingrained in Indian society for centuries, delineates social, economic, and political relationships by assigning individuals specific roles, privileges, and limitations based on their caste at birth.

Concurrently, gender operates as a locus of power, dictating social roles, expectations, and opportunities according to one's gender identity. These two systems intersect, creating a complex tapestry of discrimination, inequality, and marginalization. Understanding the intersectionality of caste and gender necessitates an exploration of the lived experiences of individuals navigating these systems. Women, particularly those from lower castes, face pervasive discrimination and violence, shaped by both patriarchal structures and the hierarchical nature of the caste system. Examining intersectionality reveals the unique challenges encountered by Dalit women, Adivasi women, and other marginalized groups, highlighting the mutually reinforcing nature of caste and gender in perpetuating their marginalization. This research paper critically analyses primary texts such as Meena Kandasamy's "When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" and "The Gypsy Goddess," delving into the intricate intersections of caste and gender within their narratives. These texts offer invaluable insights into women's lived experiences grappling with the oppressive structures of caste and gender, emphasizing the importance of comprehending the interplay between these power systems. Moreover, secondary texts such as Rupa Viswanath's "The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India" and Arundhati Roy and B.R. Ambedkar's "The Doctor and the Saint: Caste, Race, and Annihilation of Caste" will be examined to provide contextual understanding, theoretical frameworks, and critical perspectives on the intersectionality of caste and gender. By unravelling the complexities of caste and gender intersectionality, this research paper aims to contribute to a scholarly comprehension of the entangled power structures and systems of oppression that shape the lives of individuals in Indian society. It seeks to shed light on the distinctive challenges confronted by marginalized communities, underscore the imperative for

2. Present state of Electoral Practices and Politics of Tamil Nadu

While mainstream political parties make efforts to include Dalit figures and address Dalit concerns, they simultaneously erode the voter base of independent Dalit parties in the state. Mainstream parties are cautious about an independent Dalit political identity and tend to assimilate them through a combination of co-option, corruption, and occasional coercion. In Tamil Nadu, three major Dalit castes exist. The Parayar caste, predominantly found in the northern and central regions, is represented by the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) led by Thirumavalavan. The Pallars and related castes, now termed as Devendra Kula Vellalar, are in the southern and coastal delta districts, partly represented by Puthiya Tamilagam (PT) led by Dr. Krishnaswamy. The Arundhathiyars, smaller in number compared to the other two, lack an established political outfit representing them. Both VCK and PT have well-established political party structures in their respective regions and maintain year-round activity.

The estimated Dalit population in Tamil Nadu is around 20 percent, while tribals constitute about one percent of the state's population. Dalits in Tamil Nadu predominantly cast their votes for well-established political parties such as DMK, AIADMK, Congress, and the Communists. However, a smaller portion also supports Dalit-led parties like VCK and PT. Some Dalit political parties, led by individual leaders and holding influence in a limited number of Assembly constituencies, exist, but their electoral impact is minimal. In northern and central Tamil Nadu, the Parayar community faces political competition from the Vanniyars, represented by the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). The Devendra Kula Vellalar, primarily in the southern regions, contend with the Thevar community, well-represented in both AIADMK and DMK. The Arundhathiyars, being less numerous and politically marginalized, do not confront any major OBC community. Mainstream political parties in Tamil Nadu are led by OBC communities and have substantial representation in their structures. Dalit leaders within these mainstream parties hold marginal positions. Nevertheless, due to strong party structures in the DMK and AIADMK and charismatic leadership, Dalits in the state predominantly align with mainstream parties. Dalit parties often form alliances with established political parties, as contesting independently proves challenging due to resource constraints and a lack of acceptance from other communities.

In the 2016 Assembly polls, VCK, part of a third front, contested approximately 25 seats without success. Puthiya Tamilagam, despite being part of the DMK alliance, did not secure any seats. Additionally, the leading Dalit parties in the state, VCK and PT, often differ on various issues and do not consistently align with the same political allies. In the 2011 Assembly elections, VCK, part of the losing DMK alliance, failed to win any seats, while PT, in the winning AIADMK alliance, secured two seats. Because Dalit politics in the state is divided, these parties encounter a common challenge faced by many smaller parties in the region. This challenge involves pressure from mainstream parties, including Dalit parties, to contest elections using the symbols of the larger political entities. This approach poses a significant risk to the political identity of smaller parties. Mainstream parties like DMK and AIADMK assert that, due to the intense competition, smaller parties running with less popular symbols face the danger of being overshadowed.

3. Delving into the grassroot realities of the Dalit Woman and the Issue with Feminism in India being exclusionary and Casteist

The subjugation of Dalit women in India is a multifaceted social issue that demands careful analysis and attention. When examining the experiences of Dalit women within this context, it becomes evident that they endure intersecting forms of marginalization due to their caste and gender identities. In this part of

the paper, we will delve into the statistical aspects and critically evaluate the subjugation of Dalit women in India. Statistics indicate that Dalit women disproportionately experience violence and crimes. The National Crime Records Bureau of India reports alarmingly high rates of crimes against Dalit women. Instances of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and dowry-related violence are prevalent, often perpetrated by individuals from higher castes seeking to maintain their dominance and control over Dalit women. Access to education is another area of concern. Dalit women face significant barriers in obtaining education. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015-2016 revealed that the literacy rate among Dalit women is significantly lower compared to non-Dalit women. This educational disparity limits their prospects for social and economic advancement, perpetuating their subjugated status. Economic exploitation is another prominent issue faced by Dalit women. They are often subjected to economic exploitation and limited employment opportunities. Occupations such as manual scavenging, agricultural labor, and domestic work, which Dalit women are disproportionately engaged in, offer meager wages, minimal job security, and few avenues for upward mobility. Consequently, Dalit women find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty.

A critical analysis of the subjugation of Dalit women necessitates an examination of the intersectionality of caste and gender. Their oppression is a product of the interplay between these two factors. Dalit women face discrimination not only due to their caste identity but also because of their gender. This intersectionality intensifies their vulnerability, subjecting them to both caste-based discrimination and patriarchal norms prevalent in Indian society. The mistreatment of Dalit women is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of Indian society, with centuries-old caste hierarchies and notions of purity and pollution perpetuating their systematic subjugation. These deep-rooted prejudices reinforce a cycle of discrimination that makes it exceedingly challenging for Dalit women to escape their marginalized status. Although India has enacted laws and policies to protect marginalized communities, including Dalits and women, their implementation and enforcement often fall short. Strengthening implementation mechanisms, sensitizing law enforcement agencies, and establishing effective redressal systems are imperative to address the specific issues faced by Dalit women. Empowering Dalit women requires concerted efforts to address both caste and gender-based marginalization. This involves improving access to education, implementing skill development programs, and providing employment opportunities that facilitate economic independence. Additionally, raising awareness, challenging discriminatory beliefs, and advocating for the rights of Dalit women can contribute to broader social change. The Constitution of India provides a framework for the protection of the rights and welfare of Dalit women. Several provisions and government remedies are in place to address their issues. These measures aim to alleviate discrimination, promote equality, and empower Dalit women.

While these constitutional frameworks and remedies exist, it is essential to examine the grassroots reality through reports from credible newspapers and independent reporters to gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of Dalit women in India. The grassroots realities experienced by Dalit women in India reveal significant challenges, including their involvement in the sex trade, exposure to violence, and enduring subjugation. Moreover, they often find themselves excluded from upper-caste feminist discourse, which exacerbates their marginalization. By delving into these issues, we can gain crucial insights into the ordeals faced by Dalit women and the adverse side of upper-caste feminism. Dalit women are disproportionately targeted for exploitation in the sex trade, a consequence of their intersecting vulnerabilities rooted in caste and gender. Forced into prostitution and subjected to trafficking and coercion, they bear the brunt of economic deprivation, social marginalization, and limited

educational opportunities. These factors contribute to their increased susceptibility to exploitation within this industry. Violence against Dalit women manifests in various forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and caste-based violence. Deeply entrenched notions of caste hierarchy and patriarchy perpetuate their victimization.

The intersectionality of their caste and gender identities exposes them to multiple layers of violence and discrimination, further exacerbating their marginalization. The subjugation and discrimination faced by Dalit women extend beyond acts of violence. They endure social, economic, and political marginalization due to the pervasive caste system in India. Barriers to education, limited employment opportunities, and exclusion from decision-making processes impede their social mobility and perpetuate their systemic disadvantage. However, an adverse aspect of upper-caste feminism in India is its failure to address the unique challenges and experiences of Dalit women. Upper-caste feminist discourse tends to prioritize issues that predominantly concern upper-caste women, inadvertently sidelining and excluding the voices and concerns of Dalit women. This exclusionary approach reinforces existing power dynamics based on caste and further entrenches social hierarchies. Dalit women's experiences are often rendered invisible within mainstream feminist platforms, media representation, and policy discussions. Their struggles against caste-based violence, discrimination, and exclusion remain largely overlooked, undermining the collective struggle for gender equality. This invisibility perpetuates the marginalization of Dalit women and undermines efforts to achieve a more equitable society.

In some instances, Dalit women's experiences are tokenized or appropriated within upper-caste feminist discourse. Their stories may be selectively used to validate preconceived notions or fulfill specific narratives, without addressing the underlying systemic issues faced by Dalit women. This tokenism further perpetuates their marginalization and fails to address the structural inequities they encounter. Recognizing and addressing these gaps within upper-caste feminist discourse is essential to foster an inclusive and intersectional feminist movement in India. A truly inclusive approach requires centering and amplifying the voices and experiences of Dalit women. By doing so, it becomes possible to challenge and dismantle the intersecting oppressions they face and pave the way for a more equitable society that upholds the rights and dignity of all women, irrespective of caste.

4. Unveiling the Socio-Political Dimensions of Oppression in Meena Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as Young Wife'

Meena Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife' and Rokeya Sakhawat's 'Sultana's Dream' are two seminal works that delve into the profound socio-political aspects of caste, gender, and violence endured by women. By exploring these narratives within the nuanced cultural context of India, the interplay of power, oppression, and resistance portrayed in these works can be understood. In 'When I Hit You,' Kandasamy unveils the intricate connections between caste, gender, and violence through the harrowing story of an oppressed young wife. The protagonist's experiences highlight the entrenchment of patriarchal power dynamics within the institution of marriage, further compounded by the influence of caste. Kandasamy underscores how the hierarchical structure of caste intensifies the violence and subjugation faced by women. The protagonist's lower-caste background amplifies her vulnerability, as she battles not only the oppressive weight of her husband's violence but also the societal marginalization perpetuated by her caste identity.

Kandasamy's narrative serves as a critique of the pervasive patriarchal norms that underpin Indian society, shedding light on the systemic oppression endured by women across castelined. The portrayal of

the protagonist's struggle serves as a poignant commentary on the intersections of caste and gender, emphasizing the need for dismantling oppressive structures and creating a more egalitarian society. Rokeya Sakhawat's 'Sultana's Dream' offers a contrasting perspective, envisioning a feminist utopia where women are liberated from societal constraints. Although not directly related to caste, the themes of challenging gender roles and envisioning a society where women exercise agency and power resonate with Kandasamy's exploration of gender oppression. In 'Sultana's Dream,' Sakhawat crafts a world where women have gained intellectual and political supremacy, subverting the traditional power dynamics. The narrative serves as a critique of the prevailing gender norms and the relegation of women to domestic spheres. Through the character of Sultana, Sakhawat challenges the patriarchal foundations of Indian society and offers an alternative vision of women's empowerment.

Both Kandasamy and Sakhawat navigate the Indian cultural nuances in their works, highlighting the specific challenges faced by women in this context. They reveal the deep-seated nature of patriarchal oppression, ingrained within cultural and societal frameworks. In 'When I Hit You,' Kandasamy delves into the complexities of arranged marriages, familial expectations, and the influence of caste-based hierarchies, providing a vivid portrayal of the realities faced by many Indian women. Likewise, Sakhawat's 'Sultana's Dream' draws from the cultural context of India to critique the gendered norms and restrictive practices that confine women to traditional roles. The narratives from both works resonate with the lived experiences of women in Indian society, fostering a deeper understanding of the intersecting forces of caste, gender, and violence.

5. Understanding feudalism in Tamil Nadu, its relationship to Caste and the Kilvenmanimassacre to establish the foundation for exploring 'The Gypsy Goddess' by Meena Kandasamy

During the 1960s in Tamil Nadu, feudalism played a significant role in shaping the social and economic landscape of the region. Feudalism refers to a hierarchical system in which land ownership and power are concentrated in the hands of a few privileged individuals or families, who exert control over the labor and resources of the lower classes. In the context of Tamil Nadu, feudalism had a profound relationship with the caste system, further exacerbating existing social inequalities. Caste, deeply ingrained in Indian society, divides people into rigid hierarchical groups based on birth, assigning them specific roles and social status. The feudal system in Tamil Nadu reinforced and perpetuated caste-based discrimination and oppression. Feudal landlords, who were predominantly from higher castes, exercised immense power and control over land, which in turn dictated the social and economic status of the lower castes, particularly the Dalits. Under the feudal structure, landless Dalits and other lower-caste communities worked as agricultural laborers on the lands owned by the dominant castes. They faced exploitative working conditions, receiving meager wages and lacking basic rights and protections. Feudal landlords, often from upper castes, wielded immense authority over these laborers, treating them as subordinate and disposable. The intertwining of feudalism and caste created a complex web of power dynamics. Feudal landlords, in addition to exercising control over land and resources, also wielded social and cultural influence. They used their caste privilege to maintain their dominance and perpetuate the social hierarchy. The lower castes, including Dalits, were marginalized, restricted from accessing education, and subjected to various forms of discrimination and violence.

The relationship between feudalism and caste in Tamil Nadu during the 1960s was marked by the exploitation and subjugation of lower caste communities. Feudal landlords, driven by notions of caste

superiority, maintained their control over land and labor, perpetuating a system of economic and social oppression. This reinforced the existing caste-based divisions and limited the upward mobility of marginalized communities. It is important to note that the relationship between feudalism and caste was not limited to Tamil Nadu alone but had variations across different regions in India. However, in the context of Tamil Nadu during the 1960s, the intertwined nature of feudalism and caste further entrenched social inequalities and created a climate of discrimination and subjugation. The real-life massacre that occurred in 1968 in the village of Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu, where forty-four Dalits lost their lives, remains a significant and tragic event in the history of caste-based violence in India. Taking place within a context of entrenched social and economic inequalities, the incident unfolded amidst the discrimination and exploitation faced by Dalits, who occupied the lowest rung of the caste system. Kilvenmani was a village predominantly inhabited by landless Dalit agricultural laborers who toiled under the control of feudal landlords belonging to dominant castes. Seeking fair wages and improved working conditions, the Dalits organized themselves and formed a union to assert their rights. However, this display of agency and collective action posed a threat to the existing power structures, leading to a brutal retaliation orchestrated by the dominant castes. During the night of December 25, 1968, an agitated mob, incited by the landlords, attacked the Dalit community in Kilvenmani. Setting fire to their huts, the mob caused the tragic death of forty-four Dalit men, women, and children. This massacre reverberated across the nation, exposing the deep-seated caste-based violence and discrimination prevalent in society. The Kilvenmani tragedy became a poignant symbol of caste oppression and the ongoing struggle for social justice. It underscored the intricate intersectionality between caste and class, revealing how Dalit agricultural laborers faced exploitation not only due to their caste identity but also because of their economic vulnerability. The incident brought attention to the systemic inequalities deeply ingrained in the social fabric of India, prompting widespread protests and discussions on the necessity of land reforms and the eradication of caste-based discrimination. In the aftermath of the Kilvenmani massacre, a prolonged legal battle ensued, wherein the pursuit of justice became emblematic of the broader fight against caste-based discrimination. The incident acted as a catalyst for social and political movements advocating for the rights of Dalits and the dismantling of the oppressive caste system. The memory of the Kilvenmani massacre lingers within the Dalit community, serving as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for social equality and justice. It has inspired literary works, such as Meena Kandasamy's "The Gypsy Goddess," which draw inspiration from the incident to shed light on the plight of Dalits and challenge societal norms.

"The Gypsy Goddess" by Meena Kandasamy is a powerful and politically charged novel that draws inspiration from the real-life events of the Kilvenmani massacre in Tamil Nadu, India, in 1968. By examining the struggles of landless peasants and the intersecting dynamics of feudalism and caste, Kandasamy sheds light on the deep-rooted inequalities and injustices prevalent in Indian society. To critically examine "The Gypsy Goddess" in the context of Ambedkar's "Annihilation of Caste" and other Ambedkarite works, it is crucial to understand Ambedkar's ideology and his relentless fight against caste-based discrimination. Ambedkar argued for the complete eradication of the caste system and emphasized the need for social equality and justice. In the novel, Kandasamy weaves together the narratives of various characters, highlighting the interplay between feudalism and caste. She explores how caste becomes a tool of oppression, allowing dominant castes to exploit and marginalize the landless Dalit peasants. The feudal structures in Tamil Nadu further reinforce caste-based discrimination, perpetuating the cycle of oppression and exploitation. The Kilvenmani massacre serves as

astark reminder of the brutal violence faced by Dalits in their struggle for land and dignity. Kandasamy portrays the massacre and its aftermath, exposing the deep-seated prejudices and systemic injustices that led to the loss of lives. Through vivid and evocative storytelling, she captures the anguish, pain, and resilience of the Dalit community in the face of such atrocities. By drawing from Ambedkarite works, "The Gypsy Goddess" aligns itself with the ideology of social justice and the fight against caste-based oppression. Kandasamy's novel serves as a powerful medium to amplify the voices of the marginalized, challenge existing power structures, and demand accountability for the violence inflicted upon Dalits.

In examining the struggles of Dalits during the Kilvenmani massacre, Kandasamy exposes the intricate relationship between feudalism and caste. Feudal landlords, driven by their sense of entitlement and caste supremacy, exploit Dalit laborers, keeping them trapped in a cycle of poverty and subjugation. The massacre becomes a manifestation of this entrenched power imbalance, as dominant castes seek to maintain their control and suppress any attempts at resistance. Through her storytelling, Kandasamy highlights the resilience and agency of the Dalit community in the face of adversity. She humanizes the victims, giving them a voice and agency that challenges the prevailing narratives of victimhood. The novel becomes a call to action, urging society to confront and dismantle the deeply entrenched caste-based hierarchies that continue to perpetuate violence and injustice. "The Gypsy Goddess" by Meena Kandasamy critically examines the struggles of landless peasants in Tamil Nadu, shedding light on the interplay between feudalism and caste. Drawing from Ambedkar's works, the novel aligns itself with the ideology of social justice and the fight against caste-based discrimination. Through her powerful storytelling, Kandasamy highlights the plight of Dalits and demands a society that is free from the shackles of caste-based oppression.

The novel "The Gypsy Goddess" vividly portrays the systemic exploitation and oppression faced by Dalit women at the hands of upper-caste landlords. These women are subjected to various forms of violence, including sexual exploitation, physical abuse, and economic deprivation. Their marginalized position within both the caste and gender hierarchies leaves them extremely vulnerable to exploitation with limited avenues for recourse. Despite their marginalized status, the Dalit women in the novel demonstrate remarkable resilience and resistance in the face of oppression. They actively participate in labor movements and assert their demands for dignity, equality, and justice. The novel underscores the importance of solidarity among marginalized communities in challenging oppressive structures. The intersecting identities of caste and gender exacerbate the vulnerability of Dalit women. They face discrimination not only based on their caste but also because of their gender, further marginalizing them within society. The novel highlights how these intersecting forms of oppression intersect and reinforce each other, compounding the challenges faced by Dalit women. The Kilvenmani massacre depicted in the novel exemplifies the extreme forms of violence perpetuated against Dalits by upper-caste oppressors. The massacre is not only a result of economic exploitation but also a violent assertion of caste-based power and dominance. The brutal targeting of Dalit women and children underscores the gendered nature of caste violence. Through the narratives of Dalit women characters, the novel challenges dominant caste and gender narratives and offers alternative perspectives on resistance and agency. The voices of these women disrupt the traditional power structures and offer a counter-narrative to the mainstream portrayal of Dalits and women as passive victims. In the novel, Dalit women are depicted as laboring under oppressive conditions in the fields of upper-caste landlords. They are often forced to perform back-breaking work for meager wages, highlighting the economic exploitation they endure due to their caste and gender. One of the key moments of resistance in the novel occurs when the Dalit

laborers, including women, organize themselves to demand fair wages and better working conditions from the landlords. Despite facing threats and intimidation, they stand united in their struggle for justice, demonstrating solidarity among marginalized communities. The protagonist, a Dalit woman named Gauri, faces intersecting forms of oppression due to her caste and gender. She experiences discrimination and violence not only because of her Dalit identity but also because she is a woman. For instance, Gauri is subjected to sexual harassment and abuse by upper-caste men, reflecting the intersectional vulnerability of Dalit women. The Kilvenmani massacre, which serves as the central event in the novel, exemplifies the extreme violence perpetuated against Dalits by upper-caste landlords. Women and children are not spared in the massacre, highlighting the gendered nature of caste violence and the targeting of vulnerable members of the community. The Kilvenmani massacre, which serves as the central event in the novel, exemplifies the extreme violence perpetuated against Dalits by upper-caste landlords. Women and children are not spared in the massacre, highlighting the gendered nature of caste violence and the targeting of vulnerable members of the community.

In addition to "The Gypsy Goddess," Dalit women have long used literature and art as powerful tools for fighting against oppression. Dalit women have contributed significantly to the literary landscape of India, using poetry, fiction, and autobiographies to articulate their experiences of caste and gender oppression. For example, the poetry of Tamil Dalit poet Malathi Maithri addresses issues of caste discrimination, gender inequality, and Dalit identity. Her work provides a powerful voice for Dalit women and challenges dominant narratives. Dalit women authors have penned autobiographies and memoirs to narrate their life stories and highlight the intersectional challenges they face. One notable example is "Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India" by Sujatha Gidla. In this memoir, Gidla reflects on her experiences as a Dalit woman growing up in India and explores themes of caste discrimination, poverty, and resistance. Dalit women artists have used visual arts and performance as mediums for expressing their struggles and asserting their identities. For instance, Delhi-based artist Sharmila Samant's multimedia artworks explore themes of caste, gender, and social injustice. Her installations and performances challenge viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Many Dalit women activists and scholars have engaged in advocacy work and academic research to raise awareness about the intersecting forms of oppression faced by Dalit women. Organizations like the Dalit Women's Self-Respect Movement (DWSRM) in Tamil Nadu have been at the forefront of grassroots activism, organizing campaigns and protests to demand social justice and equality for Dalit women.

6. The Parallel structures in Caribbean Islands and Japan as Caste in India

Social structures, rooted in historical legacies, significantly shape the dynamics of societies across the globe. Exploring parallel social structures is reminiscent of caste systems in two distinct regions: the Caribbean Islands and Japan. While neither region replicates the intricacies of India's caste system, historical influences have given rise to unique hierarchies and social divisions.

Examining the Caribbean's historical legacy of slavery and colorism alongside Japan's Eta and Hinin system and corporate hierarchy provides insights into the complex interplay of societal structures. The Caribbean, marked by a history of colonization and slavery, witnessed the establishment of plantation economies dependent on forced labor. This historical exploitation laid the groundwork for enduring social divisions. Colorism is prevalent, reflecting a preference for lighter skin tones reminiscent of India's

caste system. This phenomenon is rooted in historical colonial influences and has contributed to enduring social stratification.

During Japan's Edo period (1603-1868), the Eta and Hinin system emerged, designating specific occupations as impure. Though officially abolished in the late 19th century, the remnants of social discrimination persist, particularly within the Burakumin community. The Eta and Hinin system created a hereditary class associated with impure occupations, leading to social discrimination. While not racially based, this system shares similarities with the hierarchical nature of caste distinctions. In the Caribbean Islands, economic inequalities persist, contributing to de facto class divisions. Wealth concentration within certain families or groups creates economic hierarchies. Diverse ethnic groups form distinct communities with unique social structures, echoing the diversity within India's caste system. Japan's corporate hierarchy, while not a traditional caste system, impacts social standing. The company one works for and their position within it can influence societal perceptions. The Burakumin community, descendants of the Eta and Hinin, faces social stigma, showcasing how historical classifications can influence social status.

The Caribbean Islands and Japan exhibit historical social structures that bear parallels to, but are distinct from, India's caste system. While colorism, economic disparities, and cultural influences shape social structures in the Caribbean, Japan's historical Eta and Hinin system and modern corporate hierarchy contribute to its unique societal fabric. Recognizing these parallels allows for a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary social structures in diverse regions. Efforts towards social justice, education, and economic empowerment remain essential for addressing and dismantling these entrenched hierarchies in both contexts. "The Tale of Genji" (Genji Monogatari) by Murasaki Shikibu is a classic work of Japanese literature, written by Murasaki Shikibu in the early 11th century, that provides a glimpse into the aristocratic society of the Heian period. While not directly addressing the social hierarchy, the novel depicts the lives of the nobility, their customs, relationships, and cultural practices, reflecting the stratified nature of Japanese society during that time. "The Tale of the Heike" (Heike Monogatari) is an epic narrative that chronicles the rise and fall of the Taira clan during the late Heian period. While primarily a tale of war and political intrigue, it also offers insights into the hierarchical structure of Japanese society, particularly the dominance of the samurai class and their relationship with the imperial court. "The Life of an Amorous Woman" (Kōshoku Ichidai Otoko) by Ihara Saikaku is also an interesting read. Ihara Saikaku, a prominent writer of the Edo period, often explored themes of social class and moral decadence in his works. "The Life of an Amorous Woman" follows the life of a courtesan from a lower-class background who navigates the complexities of love, desire, and social status in the pleasure quarters of Kyoto and Osaka. "An Artist of the Floating World" by Kazuo Ishiguro is set in post-World War II Japan. This novel by Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro delves into the themes of memory, regret, and societal change. While not explicitly focused on the caste system, it offers a nuanced portrayal of Japanese society in transition, exploring the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the legacy of Japan's militaristic past.

7. About Meena Kandasamy, her experience as a Dalit Woman and its significance in understanding her Literature

Meena Kandasamy is an acclaimed Indian author, poet, and translator known for her powerful and socially conscious works. She was born on May 19, 1984, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Kandasamy grew up in a middle-class family and belongs to the Dalit community, which is historically marginalized

and subjected to caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Kandasamy completed her education in Chennai, earning a master's degree in English Literature. She then pursued a Ph.D. in Socio-linguistics, focusing on issues related to caste and language. However, she discontinued her doctoral studies to fully devote herself to writing and activism.

As a writer, Kandasamy employs various genres, including novels, poetry, and essays, to explore and address pressing social and political issues. Her works are deeply rooted in her personal experiences as a Dalit woman and highlight the intersecting dynamics of caste, gender, and power. Kandasamy's writing is known for its boldness, honesty, and unflinching portrayal of social inequalities and injustices. Kandasamy gained significant recognition for her debut novel, "The Gypsy Goddess" (2014), which was inspired by the Kilvenmani massacre of 1968. The novel depicts the struggles of landless Dalit laborers and sheds light on the pervasive violence and discrimination faced by marginalized communities. Her critically acclaimed second novel, "When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" (2017), delves into the themes of domestic violence, patriarchy, and the complexities of marital relationships.

Throughout her career, Kandasamy has been an outspoken activist, advocating for social justice, gender equality, and the rights of marginalized communities. She uses her platform to raise awareness, challenge oppressive structures, and amplify the voices of those who are often silenced. Kandasamy's writings and activism have earned her accolades and international recognition, solidifying her position as a prominent voice in contemporary Indian literature. In addition to her own works, Kandasamy is also involved in translation projects, bringing literary works from Tamil into English. She has translated the works of prominent Tamil poets and writers, contributing to the promotion and dissemination of regional literature. Meena Kandasamy's Dalit identity has been instrumental in shaping her literary themes. Being a Dalit woman, she has personally experienced the impact of caste discrimination and gender-based oppression.

Her works often reflect the struggles, violence, and systemic injustices faced by Dalit communities. Kandasamy's writing serves as a powerful medium to challenge caste-based hierarchies, expose social inequalities, and amplify the voices of marginalized individuals. Meena Kandasamy's personal experiences as a Dalit woman serve as a foundation for her writing. Her works often draw from her own encounters with caste discrimination. Meena Kandasamy, through her poetry, embodies a persistent struggle against the oppressive treatment and atrocities faced by the non-dominant caste community. Her poetic themes encompass issues like caste, sexuality, political agendas, violence, gender oppression, and language, all with a central call to action for her readers. The essence of Kandasamy's unapologetically raw poetry lies in promoting active resistance and revolutionary activism, analysing what needs to change and rectifying it, as emphasised by the phrase "full of jagged edges" (Duarte). Coming from a caste-conscious background, Kandasamy's verses mirror a society that ruthlessly sanctions caste discrimination and violence against Dalits. Her poetry serves as a forceful tool of resistance against the deeply ingrained caste system, allowing dominant caste individuals to oppress those belonging to the non-dominant castes. The title of her initial collection, "Touch," underscores the dehumanising stigma attached to Dalits, where even their touch is considered polluting. In her poem "Touch," Kandasamy expresses her feelings regarding the plight of her community, trapped within the prejudiced and hypocritical Hindu Brahmanical system: But, you will never have known that touch—the taboo to your transcendence, when crystallised in caste was a paraphernalia of undeserving hate. (36-41) Kandasamy mocks the ancient Brahmanical caste hierarchies, which contradict the non-dualism celebrated in Hinduism, by highlighting the societal creation of "untouchable" and touchable binaries. In her acclaimed

poem "Ekalaivan," she draws attention to the caste system's origin in Hindu mythology, exemplified by Dronacharya's refusal to teach Eklavya, discriminating against him in favour of instructing the Kshatriyas. Through this poem, Kandasamy critically addresses the casteist practices embedded in mythical validation. In her poetry, she expresses her disdain for the core of the caste system, a concept Gandhi considered the "genius of Hindu society." This sentiment is evident in her poem "Mohandas Karamchand," where she vehemently rebukes Gandhi and his ideals, as reflected in the lines: You don't need your right thumb, To pull a trigger or hurl a bomb (Touch 7-8). Her second anthology, "Ms. Militancy" (2010), is infused with a seasoned understanding of gendered and caste-based issues prevalent in society. The poems within depict the dual marginalisation faced by Dalit women and challenge established structures, ancient conventions, and customs perpetuating their oppression. Kandasamy endeavours to dismantle the concept of Western Feminism that seeks to generalise the female experience. In addition to affirming her diverse cultural and social identities, Kandasamy employs poetry to subvert them. She takes female characters from established male literature, reshaping them to present an alternative portrayal. In her introduction to "Ms. Militancy," she states, "My Maamma bays for blood. My Kali kills. My Draupadi strips. My Sita climbs onto a stranger's lap. All my women militate. They brave bombs, they belittle kings. They take on the sun, they take after me" (Kandasamy 9). The title poem of her collection, "Ms. Militancy," draws inspiration from the revolutionary female character Kannaki in the classic Tamil text *Silapathikaram*. Initially depicted as a subject of patriarchy in the play, Kannaki transforms into a symbol of intense female revolution by the end. Kandasamy positions her as the embodiment of the revolt she envisions in the female Dalit persona, expressing, "Vending vengeance, she made a bomb of her left breast and blew up the blasted city" (Kandasamy, *Ms. Militancy* 21-22). In prominent Tamil Dalit literary works, women are portrayed as doubly victimised, facing male exploitation from their husbands, fathers, and sons. Examples of such depictions can be found in Sivakami's novel "Pazhiyana Kazidalum" (1989) and Bama's autobiography "Karukku" (1992). Among Dalits, women endure the most significant suffering, and a solely Dalit or feminist movement alone may not sufficiently address the challenges faced by Dalit women. The new generation of Dalit women is unwilling to endure the hardships endured by their predecessors for centuries. Bela Malik, reporting on a Dalit women's summit organised by the All-India Democratic Women's Association in December 20, 1998, noted that the younger women are more militant and less willing to tolerate the terms of their existence. This observation holds true for Meena Kandasamy, who produces both fiction and poetry. Despite being a well-read writer in her early thirties, her work does not lack experiential depth. Kandasamy's work primarily addresses themes of love, caste, and society, and it reflects a keen awareness of her past and is firmly rooted in the reality of her Dalit identity. Dalits in India have drawn considerable inspiration from Black-American movements, exemplified by the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra, which was directly influenced by the American Black Panthers Movement. Despite both communities experiencing marginalisation and victimisation to some extent, Kandasamy seeks to illustrate temperamental differences between them. She parodies Gwendolyn Brooks' renowned poem "We Real Cool," eulogising the cool trait of the Black community, akin to the characterization of the then American president as Cool-Obama. Kandasamy distinguishes it from the fervent temperament of her own community. Responding to Brooks' lines with, "We real hot. We / Never rot... We / Never late. We / Defy fate," she represents the passionate Dalit temperament, possibly reflecting her own sentiments or those of the younger generation. This portrayal challenges the notion that Dalits are entrenched in the complex web of ancient Indian mythical customs. Similarly, taking inspiration from Sylvia

Plath's apostrophic poem "Daddy," Kandasamy writes a powerful poem titled "MohandaKaramshand," addressing the Indian "daddy" (literally meaning Bapu). Her rage and fury manifest in an energetic address to the father of the nation, demystifying the apostle of ahimsa (non-violence). She critiques the derogatory act of labelling Dalits as Harijans, considering it as demeaning as any other pejorative speech act would be.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Meena Kandasamy's literature offers a compelling exploration of caste and gender intersectionality, providing readers with insights into the lived experiences of Dalit women in India. Through her vivid storytelling and nuanced characterizations, Kandasamy exposes the systemic injustices faced by Dalit women, while also celebrating their resilience, agency, and collective resistance. By centering the voices and narratives of Dalit women, Kandasamy challenges dominant power structures, disrupts entrenched hierarchies, and advocates for a more inclusive and equitable society. As scholars and activists continue to engage with Kandasamy's work, her literature will undoubtedly remain a vital resource for understanding and addressing the intersecting forms of oppression faced by marginalized communities in India and beyond.

9. References

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