

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 39
Meena Kandasamy

Good morning friends, and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian poetry in English. You remember well, that we are in the last week of our lecture. And in this lecture, we are talking about Marginalized Voice. In the previous lecture, we talked about Jeet Thayil. And we could also see, how his world comprises different sorts of realities.

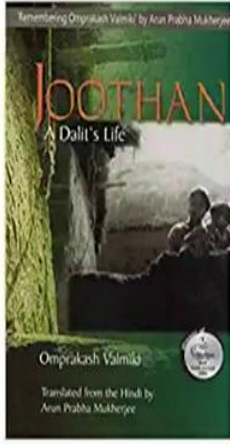
Again in this lecture, we are going to talk about one such voice which, of course, if we compare with the sort of poets that we have discussed so far is of course, the youngest of all, but then there is a lot of aggression, there is a lot of rebellion, there is a lot of assertiveness in this poet, and the name of this poet is Meena Kandasamy.

Now, Meena Kandasamy actually is known for her assertive voice. And not only for her assertive voice, but then there is actually a reason behind, because when Meena started writing her poems, it appeared as if we were having another Kamala Das. We have already talked a lot about it. We have also talked about Meena Alexander, but then Meena Alexander was a different sort of poet.

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Dalit Literature

- ❖ Dalit writings, emerged in 1960s, talks about the lives of Dalit.
- ❖ Traces the discrimination and atrocities which Dalit community faced.
- ❖ Explores the social reality of our society.
- ❖ Includes ideological insights of Ambedkar.
- ❖ Delineates Dalit consciousness
- ❖ Dalit literature spread across languages like, Marathi, Kannad, Hindi, and English.



Remembering Omprakash Valmiki by Arun Prabha Maheswari

Omprakash Valmiki
Translated from the Hindi by
Arun Prabha Maheswari

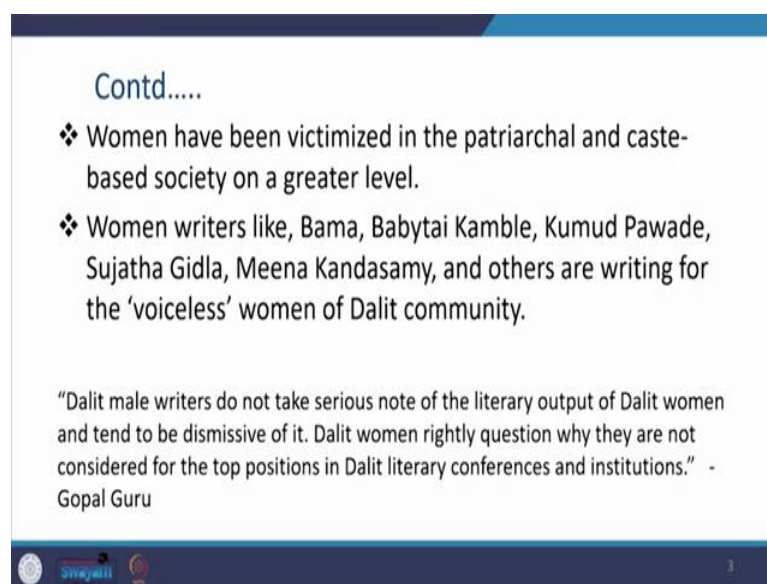
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But here when we talk about Meena Kandasamy, we find that Meena Kandasamy is a voice of Dalit literature. Now, till now you might have simply been hearing about different sorts of writing, but then here is a poet specially a woman poet, who talks about Dalit literature. And then the description of her poems actually give you an impression that not only Meena stands as a representative of Dalit voices, and she lends her voice to the voiceless people, but at the same time she has in her poetic corpus another voice that is the voice of a woman.

How they have been doubly discarded, doubly suppressed, doubly subjected and how they have been doubly persecuted we find. Because when we talk about Dalit writings which actually emerged in the 1960s and which talks about Dalit lives, which talks about Dalit's realities and their discrimination and atrocities that they have been a part of it.

Meena actually is a representative voice who explores the social reality of our society. Till now, we have simply been hearing about many Dalit voices who have not only through their autobiographies and through their fictional works have tried to portray reality, but in the world of Meena Kandasamy we find that, she not only includes the ideological insights of Ambedkar, but she actually represents Dalit consciousness. Dalit literature, which is spread across languages like Marathi, Kannada, Hindi and English.

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- ❖ Women have been victimized in the patriarchal and caste-based society on a greater level.
- ❖ Women writers like, Bama, Babytai Kamble, Kumud Pawade, Sujatha Gidla, Meena Kandasamy, and others are writing for the 'voiceless' women of Dalit community.

"Dalit male writers do not take serious note of the literary output of Dalit women and tend to be dismissive of it. Dalit women rightly question why they are not considered for the top positions in Dalit literary conferences and institutions." - Gopal Guru

In the case of discussing Meena Kandasamy's world, we find that women though they have been portrayed as being victimized in a patriarchal order, but they also have become a victim of caste -based society on a greater level.

Many of you might have come across the fictional works of Bama then Babytai Kamble, Kumud Pawade, Sujatha Gidla, Meena Kandasamy and others who are actually writing for the women who have been suppressed, and who have been subjected to different sorts of discriminations.

Now, in this regard before we move on to the works of Meena Kandasamy, let us take a very small observation by Gopal Guru who says that "Dalit male writers do not take serious note of the literary output of Dalit women. That is why we say, Dalit women they are doubly subjected to discrimination and tend to be dismissive of it. Dalit women rightly question, why they are not considered for the top positions in Dalit literary conferences and institutions?"

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Meena(Ilaveni) Kandasamy

- Born in 1984 in Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.
- A Ph.D in Socio-linguistics.
- Writer-in- residence at the university of Iowa's International Writing programme in 2009
- Charles Wallace India trust fellow at the University of Kent in 2011.
- Novelist, poet, translator, academician, journalist, and activist
- Translated many books of Dalit writers into English.
- A prominent voice of Dalit writings.
- Also an actor who was visible in the Malayalam film, *Oraalppokkam*.
- Writes against the systematic subjugation of women.





Now, when we come to Meena Kandasamy, we will find that Meena Kandasamy who was actually born in 1984 and that way we can find how she is a contemporary poet and an activist, because as a poet she is an activist you will find in her works a lot of aggression. Oh! it appears as if her emotions were totally uncontrolled when she talks about these discriminations.

So, born in Chennai in 1984, Meena holds a Ph. D in Socio-linguistics. She was actually a writer in residence at the university of Iowa's International Writing Programme in 2009. She also had the opportunity of being a Charles Wallace India trust fellow at the University of Kent in 2011.

Meena is a novelist, a poet, translator, academician, journalist and activist. But, we have to understand the poetic world of Meena Kandasamy. And we have taken Meena Kandasamy to see the sort of activism and many of us will find, that it is actually an echo of Kamala Das though in a different way.

She adds the caste flavour, apart from the women's question. Meena has become a prominent voice of Dalit writings. She had also been an actor who was visible in the Malayalam film "Oraalppokkam". Meena writes against the systematic subjugation of women.

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- Hailed as the first Indian Dalit poet writing in English.
- She edited The Dalit, a bimonthly alternative English magazine of the Dalit Media Network.
- She writes her "womanness, Tamilness and low/ outcasteness".

She says, "..... my gender, language and castelessness were not anything that I had to be ashamed of... I wrote poetry very well aware of who I was. But I was also sure of how I wanted to be seen. I wanted to be taken on my own terms... I wanted to be totally bare and intensely exposed to the world through my writings. I wanted it to be my rebellion against the world."

Now, having understood Meena's bio, we also can see that Meena was held as the first Indian Dalit poet, who was writing in English. She also got the chance of editing *The Dalit*, which was a bi-monthly alternative English magazine of the Dalit media work. She writes her "womanness, her Tamilness and low outcasteness".

She has herself said and admitted, "My gender, language and castelessness, were not anything that I had to be ashamed of." So, initially when Meena started writing of

course, even when a new writer comes, there are lots of criticism and all. But Meena says that she is not ashamed of her gender, language and castelessness.

“I wrote poetry very well, aware of who I was, as also sure of how I wanted to be seen, I wanted to be taken on my own terms, I wanted to be totally bare and intensely exposed to the world through my writings, I wanted it to be my rebellion against the world.”

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So, that way shows Meena's firmness, Meena's determination to raise a sort of tirade against the sort of discrimination that women have been facing, not only because of their being women, but also their being of a different caste. Kandasamy's literary corpus involves only two poetry collections, because she has become very famous because of her novels and other writings.

But the two collections that she has to her credit are very significant and the one is entitled *Touch*. See, look at the title *Touch*, where she raises the caste question, fine. And then the another one is *Ms. Militancy* where Meena also talks about how women can also take revenge.

And then she takes some references from some early writings of Tamil literature where she mentions, in *Ms. Militancy* what Meena says she refers to caste oppression. And then she mentions the story of Kannagi and Kovalan. Kannagi and Kovalan, and the entire book has in its backdrop Kannagi's revenge.

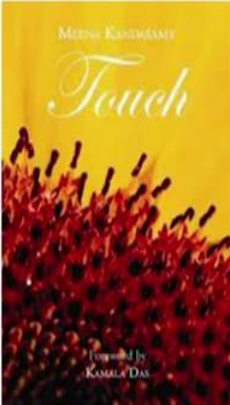
Actually, Meena tries to make it immortal story for the king's punishment of her husband of Kannagi's husband with the death penalty, by making a bomb of the left breast blowing the whole city.

Now, while she takes into reference this story Tamil epic *Silappatikaram*, but then here she talks about the question of every woman, how every woman can take a revenge against the sort of discrimination that they have to face. Then her novels include *The Gypsy Goddess* which came out in 2014, then *When I Hit You* in 2018, and then *Exquisite Cadavers* in 2019.

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Touch (2006)

- ❖ Her first poetic collection, having 84 poems.
- ❖ Divided into seven sections, namely *Bring him to worship you*, *Touch*, *Add some spice*, *To that more congenial spot*, *Lines of control*, *Slander is a slaughterhouse*, *Their daughters*.
- ❖ Critiques the male-dominated social framework.
- ❖ Addresses the question of women's identity.
- ❖ Celebration of love and demand for gender equality.



Her very first collection entitled *Touch*, which came out in the year 2006 and Meena actually became a very famous with this. This collection has got 84 poems fine. And this is divided into seven sections and all these sections have different names. *Bring him to Worship you*, *Touch*, *Add Some Spice*, *To That More Congenial Spot*, *Lines of Control*, *Slander is a Slaughterhouse*, and then *Their Daughters*.

So, majority of the poems in these sections not only talk about caste, they not only talk about touch, they not only talk about Meena's tirade against the high class, high caste people, but then she raises the question of untouchability. And then she also talks about how this male dominated society, this patriarchal society has given a different treatment to women. Not only does she talk about question of women's identity, but then there is a cry for love, there is a cry for the demand for equality in terms of love.

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The slide features a title "Touch" at the top center. Below it, the poem's text is displayed with several lines underlined in red. To the right of the poem is a blue circular graphic containing a quote. At the bottom left of the slide, there are logos for Swajathi and a small circular icon. The number "8" is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide.

" Touch"

You will have known almost
Every knowledgeable thing about
The charms and temptations
That touch could hold.
But, you will never have known
That touch- the taboo
To your transcendence.
When crystallized in caste
Was a paraphernalia of
Undeserving hate. (" Touch",32-41)

" The poet in me will
not exist without the
activist in me.. .writing
lets me be an activist."
(Kandasamy)

Swajathi 8

Let us take one poem from this collection which is actually the title of this collection entitled *Touch*. And you will find, how very spontaneously does she interrogate, and she says,

You will have known almost
Every knowledgeable thing about
The charms and temptations
That touch could hold fine.

She says that, touch is a very significant feeling, but then you might have known almost every knowledgeable thing, but what you do not know is, and she continues the poem,

But you will never have known
That touch- the taboo
To your transcendence
When crystallized in caste
Was a paraphernalia of
Undeserving hate.

So, now people may talk about touch, but then this touch is some way or the other subjected to a sort of hatred. Why Meena becomes so aggressive? Why she becomes so assertive? As she says that her writing is full of her activism, and she says- "The poet in

me will not exist without the activist in me.” So, she can be considered to be an activist poet who actually raises many questions.

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General Themes of Her Poems

- ❖ Voice of the 'voiceless'
- ❖ Marginalization of a major section of society
- ❖ Dalit consciousness
- ❖ Voice of resistance
- ❖ Depiction of Dalit women in her writings
- ❖ Caste and gender issue
- ❖ Women's liberation
- ❖ Love is an essential element of her poems.

But, when they come to see you
For a possible bride, look at the floor
The fading carpet and the unshapely toes
Of the visitors who will inspect the weight
Of your gold, the paleness of your complexion
The length of your hair and ask questions about
The degrees you hold and the transparency of your past.
(Touch, 127)

But her activism can be shown in a different light as if it is not only a sort of interrogation, it is also a sort of message for the reformation of the society, reconstruction of the society not the recreation of it.

So, if we have a look at the themes of her poem, we can find that Meena is also like many voices of marginalized people. She is a representative voice of the voiceless people fine. And there is an element of Dalit consciousness, through resistance and through women's liberation. Meena actually tries to make every one realize that love is an essential element not only of life, but also of poem.

We can take one poem once again from *Touch* where she says and this is not in a way on caste, but this is in a way the general trend of what happens in our society, when a woman's question of marriage is being discussed. And then in a very scathing way Meena says,

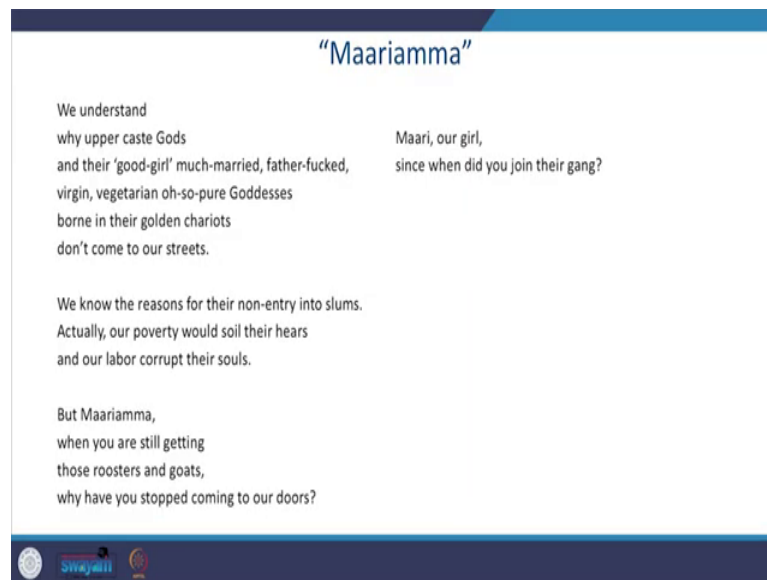
But when they come to see you
For a possible bride, look at
the floor.

I mean right from the beginning you are shown, you are made to realize that you have to look at the floor.

The fading carpet and the
Unshapely toes
Of the visitors who will inspect
The weight,
Will inspect the weight
Of your gold, the paleness of
Your complexion
The length of your hair and ask you
questions about
The degrees you hold and the
transparency of your past.

I mean why is such a question only to a woman who is going to be married? Is it not a sort of discrimination? So, Meena raises a very genuine concern not only on the basis of the caste line, but then she also talks about the women in general.

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And while she talks about the caste factor, she actually brings to question one poem entitled *Maariamamma*, which is actually a Hindu goddess of rain and fertility. And then she says that how even this Hindu goddess who even being a woman, how she also joined the gang of the upper class?

And she in a very pathetic manner, in a very sympathetic manner, in a very pitiable manner, in a very commiserating way she says,

We understand
Why upper caste Gods
and their 'good girl' much-married, father fucked,
Virgin, vegetarian oh-so-pure Goddesses
borne in their golden chariots
do not come to our streets.
We know the reasons for their non-entry into slums.

Now she also in a way hints at the pitiable condition of these poor people living in slums. And then she says,

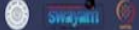
Actually, our poverty would soil their hears
and our labor corrupt their souls,
But Maariamamma
when you are still getting
those roosters and goats,
why have you stopped coming to our doors?
Maari, our girl,
since when did you join their gang?

You also became a part of it. I was not so sure of it, you also being a woman how did you part your ways and how did you join their company? So, in one poem after another we can find the sort of tirade. And you know Meena does not believe in any particular religion or in any particular faith, rather even when she questions Gandhi whom all of us provide a lot of respect and then, but then she interrogates and what she says ,you called us Harijans, fine.

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“Mohandas Karamchand”
(written after reading Sylvia Plath’s Daddy)

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|--|---|
| <p>“Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood.” —Albert Einstein</p> <p>Who? Who? Who? Mahatma. Sorry no. Truth. Non-violence. Stop it. Enough taboo. That trash is long overdue. You need a thorough review. Your tax-free salt stimulated our wounds We gonna sue you, the Congress shoe. Gone half-cuckoo, you called us names, You dubbed us pariahs—“Harijans” goody-goody guys of a bigot god Ram Ram Hey Ram—boo.</p> | <p>Don’t ever act like a holy saint. we can see through you, impure you. Remember, how you dealt with your poor wife. But, they wrote your books, they made your life. They stuffed you up, the imposter true. And sew you up—filled you with virtue and gave you all that glossy deeds enough reason we still lick you. You knew, you bloody well knew, Caste won’t go, they wouldn’t let it go. It haunts us now, the way you do with a spooky stick, a eerie laugh or two. But they killed you, the naked you, your blood with mud was gooeey goo. Sadist fool, you killed your body many times before this too. Bapu, bapu, you big fraud, we hate you.</p> |
|--|---|



“Goody-goody guys of a bigot god/Ram Ram Hey Ram- boo.”

I mean it appears that in her aggression she also forgets the standards, fine, because the poem begins,

“Who?Who?Who

Mahatma. Sorry no.

Truth. Non-violence.

Stop it. Enough taboo.”

And then she says, you called us names because you called us Harijans:

Do not ever act like a holy saint.
So, there is an attack even on Gandhi.
We can see through you, impure you.
Remember, how you dealt with your poor wife.
But, they wrote your books, they made your life.
They stuffed you up, the imposter true.
And sew you up- filled you with virtue
and gave you all that glossy deeds
enough reason we will lick
you knew, you bloody well knew,
Caste would not go, they would not let it go.

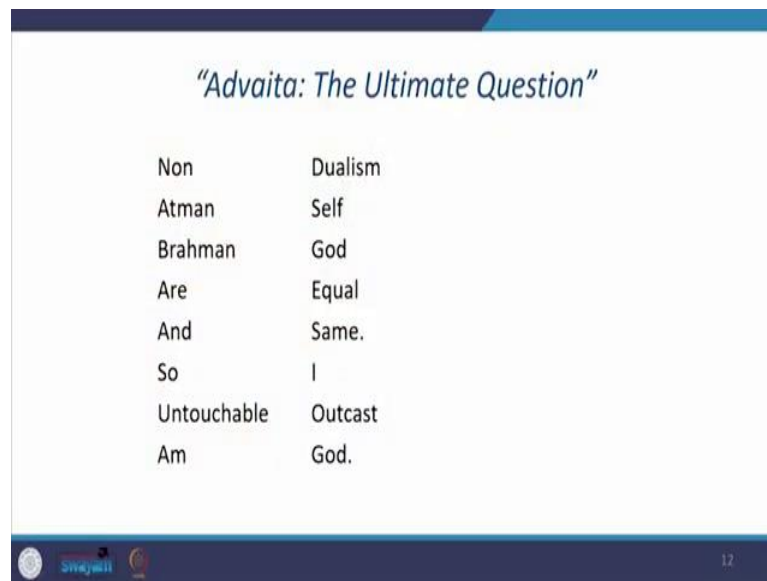
It haunts us even though you might have tried a lot that caste will go, but has caste really gone? No. And then she says she actually reminds Gandhi and says,

But they killed you, they naked you,

Your blood with mud was goeey goo
Sadist fool, you killed your body
many times before this too
Bapu, Bapu, you big fraud, we hate you.

See, such is a sort of aggression, such is a sort of hatred, such is a sort of deterministic views, and one can find that through such views what as a poet she tries to do. She actually tries to bring a sort of reform and again in one poem after another not only she tries to experiment she rather breaks the rules of poems.

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| <i>"Advaita: The Ultimate Question"</i> | |
|---|---------|
| Non | Dualism |
| Atman | Self |
| Brahman | God |
| Are | Equal |
| And | Same. |
| So | I |
| Untouchable | Outcast |
| Am | God. |

And in this poem entitle *Advaita: The Ultimate Question* you can find how she tries to make it a sort of formula which we can call hieroglyphs another sort of writing and the poem begins with

“Non Dualism /Atman Self/Brahman God /Are Equal”

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Contd...

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|-------------|----------|
| Will | You |
| Ever | Agree? |
| No | Matter |
| What | You |
| Preach | Answer |
| Me. | Through |
| Your | Saints. |
| One | More |
| Final | Question |
| Can | My |
| Untouchable | Atman |
| And | Your |
| Brahmin | Atman |
| Ever | Be |
| One | |
| ? | |

?

And as the poem proceeds towards the end she will say

“Can My/ Untouchable Atman/ And Your /Brahmin Atman/Ever Be/ One?”

So, she puts the question, my dear friends, that will all this talk, you know, all this big talks, can my untouchable Atman and your Brahmin Atman ever be one? Can we really bridge these gaps? We cannot.

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“Dead Woman Walking” (from Ms. Militancy)

I am a dead woman walking asylum corridors,
with faltering step, with felted, flying hair,
with hollowed cheeks that offset bulging eyes,
with welts on my wrists, with creasing skin,
with seizures of speech and song, with a single story
between my sobbing, pendulous breasts.

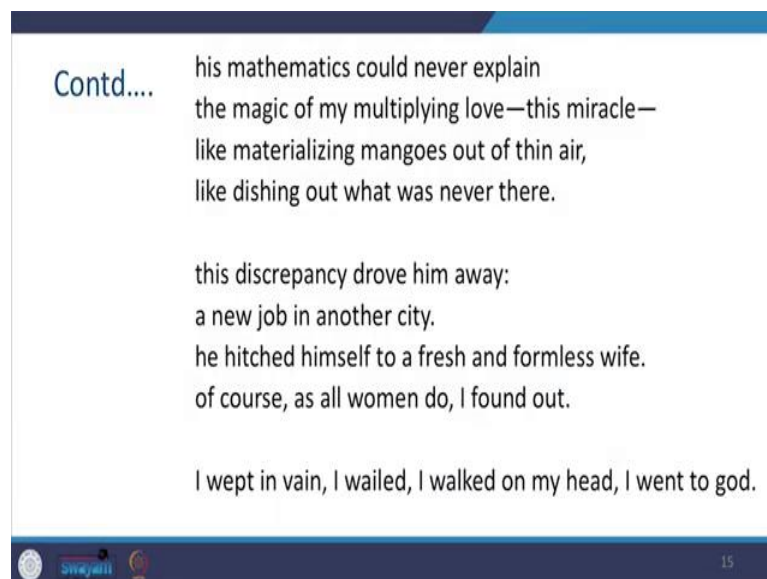
once I was a wife: beautiful,
married to a merchant: shifty-eyed.
living the life, until he was lost in listless doubt—
of how, what I gave him was more delicious
than whatever, whatever had been given to me.

And then, again in another poem entitled *Dead Woman Walking* which is from *Ms. Militancy* .I have already told you how it is actually a sort of revenge. Here, in this poem she talks about a woman who simply because she was having some problems she was deserted, she was abandoned and what she says actually can bring tears to any sensible creature.

She says,
I am a dead woman walking asylum corridors,
with faltering step, with felted, flying hair,
with hollowed cheeks that offset bulging eyes.
And as the poem proceeds she says,
Once I was a wife: beautiful,
married to a merchant: shifty- eyed,
living the life, until he was lost in listless doubt-
of how, what I gave him was more delicious
than whatever, had been given to me.

I mean is marriage only a give and take relationship? And then when mercenary motives involve this beautiful bond the marriage actually comes to fail, falter, fritter away.

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And she says--

“his mathematics could never explain
the magic of my multiplying love-
My love kept on multiplying, but he was very calculative.
This discrepancy drove him away:
a new job in another city. and then
he hitched himself to a fresh and formless wife.
Of course, as all women do, I found out.”

I wept in vain, I wailed, I walked on my head ,I went to god,
but is there any justice there also.

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Contd...

I sang in praise of dancing dervishes, I made
music
for this world to devour on some dejected day.
I shed my beauty, I sacrificed my six senses.
some called me mad, some called me mother
but all of them led me here,
to this land of the living-dead.

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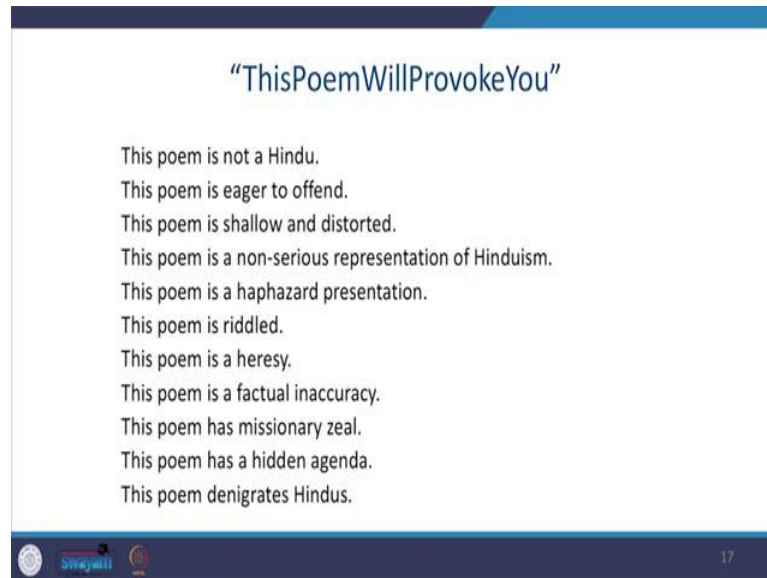
And she says,

“I sang in praise of dancing dervishes, I made
music
for this world to devour on some dejected day, but finally,
some called me mad, some called me mother,
but all of them led me here,
to this land of the living- dead.”

So, ultimately I was cheated in the course of love, and how can one talk to, and how can one share in the name of marriage and bond, all these mantras and all these traditional rites and all-- ultimately I have been considered mad I have been considered simply a mother because man’s eyes are always shifting.

Then there are poems after poem you can find. And in this poem also, this poem will provoke you here you can find there is a repetition of the lines. And this repetition also stands for a sort of assertiveness, where there are certain you know sentences which may really tear you apart where she says, this poem is riddled.

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This poem is not a Hindu.
This poem is eager to offend,
This poem is shallow and distorted. and it continues,
This poem denigrates Hindus,
This poem has a hidden agenda,
This poem shows them in poor light,
This poem concentrates on the negative aspects of Hinduism.
And towards the end she says,
This poem declares itself the Hindu canon,
This poem follows the monkey worships the horse,
This poem supersedes the Vedas and again.

So, while we discuss this poem smears Rama for his suspicious mind, this poem was once forced into Sati. So, through this poem she actually tells that all the different things that have been done-- were they really fair enough? She questions even Rama for his doubting Sita. And in one poem she also mentions actually this poem is very beautiful where it is called *Another Paradise Lost*.

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“Another Paradise Lost”

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>...I was Nahusa the Great. My subjects were happy, the kingdom prosperous. And I ruled for twelve thousand years, until the day</p> <p>when I decided that I could take leave of life. In heaven too, I was venerated. But one question had plagued me all the years of my long life, and it still tormented me in heaven. I wanted to know why</p> <p>caste was there, why people suffered because of their karmas. I questioned the Gods, and the learned sages there. I asked them what would happen if an high-born did manual work just like the low-born.</p> <p>I worried about the division of labor, this disparity in dreams and destinies. You could say I was a rebel pleading for liberty-equality-fraternity. I had a riotous history of revolution. The Gods plotted against me,</p> <p>decided that I was trouble. I was cursed to turn into</p> | <p>a vile snake. I was banished from paradise. For sixty million years, I shall roam the earth, and then I may return.” This was a different case of the paradise lost.</p> <p>In this tale, there was no forbidden fruit, no second fickle-minded woman. Tradition triumphed over reason and the good were cast away. I let the serpent go, happy that he had given my hungry mind a story, or</p> <p>perhaps, a poem to be written on unfair days. I began to respect snakes — the challengers of hierarchy. While I gave him the freedom of safe passage I vowed never to kill serpents. Much later</p> <p>I realized brutally that this was just another occupational hazard for choosing a life where I was to be showing solidarity with activists and dissenters.</p> |
|---|--|

Swajali 21

And this is actually an interaction between a snake and the poet and the snake is quite near the fridge and the poet wants to kill the snake, but then the snake tells its own story. And when the snake says

“I was Nahusa the great...”

Actually this Nahusa was from a line of kings and having served for many you know thousand years Nahusa actually wanted to go to heaven. And went heaven and there Nahusa was also venerated, but then Nahusa one day asked a question---

I wanted to know why caste was there
why people suffered because of their karmas
I questioned the Gods. And the learned
sages there. I asked them what would happen if an
high- born did manual work just like the low born?

So, I was not supposed to be in the kingdom of the heaven I was not supposed to raise even any question. And then the snake says;

In this tale, there was no forbidden fruit, no second
fickle minded woman. Tradition triumphed over reason
and the good were cast away I let the serpent go,
happy that he had given my hungry mind a story.

The snake actually told that I was simply thrown away because I raised a question. And I was said that I was banished from paradise for 60 million years I will have to roam on this earth...And the poet towards the end says;

“While I gave him the freedom of safe passage/I vowed never to kill serpents.”

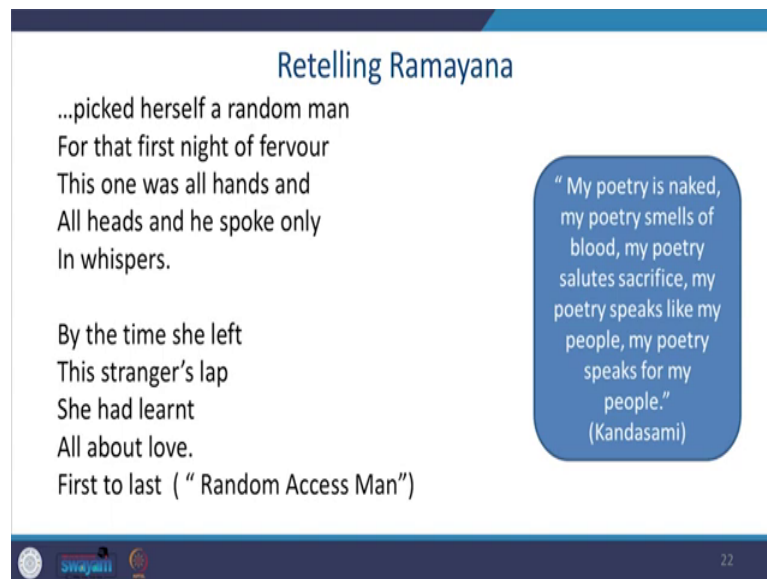
So, we often hate, we often are afraid of snakes, but the poet says, that when I heard the story of the snake,

I realized brutally that this was just another occupational hazard for choosing a life where I was to be showing solidarity with activists and dissenters.

You cannot raise a question, you cannot descend, rather you have to be submissive. And so the poet does not kill the snake, rather she says that I got another occupational hazard for choosing a life, and this was the life of a Rebellion.

She also, I mean Meena Kandasamy also retells *The Ramayana* in a different way where she says, that since Rama was doubtful and Rama had gone to the forest. And you know, when Rama went to the forest he perhaps had done a mistake and had abandoned Sita, and Sita had to choose a random man.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:03)



The slide is titled "Retelling Ramayana" in blue text. It contains two main sections of text. The first section is a poem: "...picked herself a random man / For that first night of fervour / This one was all hands and / All heads and he spoke only / In whispers." The second section is another poem: "By the time she left / This stranger's lap / She had learnt / All about love. / First to last (' Random Access Man')". To the right of the second poem is a blue rounded rectangle containing a quote: "My poetry is naked, my poetry smells of blood, my poetry salutes sacrifice, my poetry speaks like my people, my poetry speaks for my people." followed by "(Kandasami)". At the bottom left of the slide are three small logos, and at the bottom right is the number "22".

And the poetess says:

I picked herself a random man
For that first night of fervour,
This one was all hands and
All heads and he spoke only
in whispers.
By the time she left

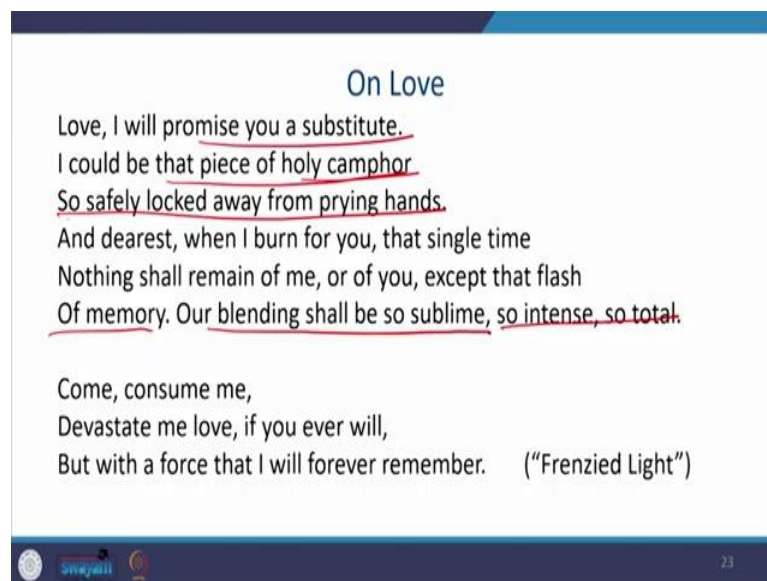
This stranger's lap
She had learnt
All about love.
First to last.

So, perhaps even Sita was also denied love, that is what she retells Ramayana in a different way and Sita also had to take a random access man.

Of course, we may criticize Kandasamy as a poet, who has actually taken a tirade against all sorts of discriminations and all, but then what she says in defence is- "My poetry is naked, my poetry smells of blood, my poetry salutes sacrifice, my poetry speaks like my people, my poetry speaks for my people."

And, but to say that Kandasamy did not talk of love will perhaps be an injustice, because Kandasamy was all through struggling only for love, only for realization of love not on the base of caste, not on the base of colours, but on the base of selfless emotions. And in one poem entitled *Frenzied Light* what she says is quite true.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:27)



She says, "Love ,I will promise you a substitute".

Because there has been a tradition we say that candle is the representative of love, but she says no.

"I could be that piece of holy camphor.
So, safely locked away from prying hands
And dearest, when I burn for you, that single time

Nothing shall remain of me, or of you, except that flash of memory. Our blending shall be so sublime, so intense, so total.

So, love is not one sided, love actually should be two sided. And she says, that let me substitute a camphor and we two will burn and we two will merge in each other, submerge in each other, dissolve in each other, create a sort of unity

“Come, consume me,
Devastate me love, if you ever will,
But with a force that I will forever remember.”

that actually should be the capability of love, that actually should be the unity of love, that actually should be the essence of love.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:30)

The slide is titled "As a Poet" and contains the following content:

- ❖ Examines Indian tradition of domination of one particular community.
- ❖ Deconstructs Indian myth and religions to find the real cause of discrimination against Dalit community.
- ❖ For instance, in her poem *Ekalaviva*, she critiques Dronacharya for his casteist approach towards Ekalavya.
- ❖ Also examines the plight of women in our society.

On the right side of the slide, there is a blue rounded rectangle containing the following text:

To make her yours and yours alone,
You pushed her deeper into harems
Where she could see the sunlight
Only from the lattice windows.
Domesticated into drudgery she was
just
Another territory, worn out by wars. A
slave
Who maintained your numbers.
(Touch, 112)

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "Sreyas" and "Sreyas" and the number "24".

When we analyze Meena Kandasamy as a poet, we can find Meena Kandasamy examining Indian tradition of dominance of one particular community over the degraded which we call over the marginalized ones. She actually tries to deconstruct Indian myth and religions, to find the real cause of discrimination against Dalit. And that is why she has at times also criticized Ekalavya. In one of his poems “Ekalavya”, she says that Dronacharya also should be held responsible because he was casteist and that is why he did not give lessons to Ekalavya.

She also tries to examine the plight of women. And in one poem when she says,

To make her yours and yours alone,

You pushed her deeper into harems.

Again the question of women,

Where she could see the sunlight

Only from the lattice windows”

I mean women are not to be imprisoned rather they are not to be,

“Domesticated into drudgery as she was/Just/Another territory,”

Woman is not a territory. She is not to be

“worn out by wars .A

slave

Who maintained simply your numbers.”

(Refer Slide Time: 29:55)

Contd...

- ❖ Delineation of caste-based discrimination dominates her poetry.
- ❖ Critiques Gandhi for naming Dalits as *Harijans*.
- ❖ Presents a counter narrative to the discourse of upper caste people.
- ❖ Always presents her strong voice against the casteist mindset.

Algorithm for converting a Shudra into a Brahmin/ Begin.

Step 1: Take a beautiful Shudra girl.
Step 2: Make her marry a Brahmin.
Step 3: Let her give birth to his female child.
Step 4: Let this child marry a Brahmin.
Step 5: Repeat steps 3-4 six times.
Step 6: Display the end product. It is a Brahmin./ End.
(*Becoming a Brahmin*, from *Touch*, 42)

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So, having discussed the poems of Meena Kandasamy we find, that Meena is completely obsessed with the sort of maltreatment that has been meted out not only to woman, but also to woman of different castes and specially on the basis of caste.

We find, that not only does she critique Gandhi for naming Dalits as Harijans, but she also tries to produce and present a counter narrative to the discourse of upper caste people. Meena presents her strong voice against the casteist mind-set she actually also in one of the poems entitled *Algorithm for Converting a Shudra into Brahmin*. She gives a formula:

- Step 1: Take a beautiful Shudra girl.
- Step 2: Make her marry a Brahmin.
- Step 3: Let her give birth to his female child.
- Step 4: Let this child marry a Brahmin
- Step 5: Repeat a step three to four six times.
- Step 6: Display the end product. it is a Brahmin.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:05)

Conclusion

- A champion of subaltern voice in Indian English Writing.
- Presents an alternative discourse of identity politics and gender equality.
- Kamla Das says about her,

Dying and then resurrecting herself again and again in a country that refuses to forget the unkind myths of caste and perhaps of religion, Meena carries as her twin self, her shadow the dark cynicism of youth that must help her to survive. 'Happiness is a hollow world for fools to inhabit' cries Meena at a moment of revelation. Revelations come to her frequently and prophecies linger at her lips.

Swayam 26

So, at times she also tries to create humour, but then before we conclude we have to see that Meena has re-emerged, I mean, after Kamala Das she has emerged as a champion not only of woman, but of subaltern voice in Indian poetry in English. She presents an alternative discourse of identity politics.

And that is why, in the preface to her book what Kamala Das says is --

“Dying and then resurrecting herself again and again in a country that refuses to forget the unkind myths of caste and perhaps of religion. Meena carries as her twin self her shadow the dark cynicism of youth that must help to her survive. Happiness is a hollow world for fools to inhabit, cries Meena at a moment of revelation. Revelations come to herself frequently and prophecies linger at her lips.”

(Refer Slide Time: 31:58)

Ours is a silence /that waits. Endlessly waits.

And then, unable to bear it
any further, it breaks into wails.

But not all suppressed reactions
end in our bemoaning the tragedy.

Sometimes,/ the outward signals
of inward struggles takes colossal forms
And the revolution happens because our dreams
explode.

Most of the time:
Aggression is the best kind of trouble-shooting.
(Aggression)

Thank You

Swajill

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Now, to conclude or to sum up let us once again take the lines of her poem *Aggression* where she says,

“Sometimes, the outward signals
of inward struggles take colossal forms.
And the revolution happens because our dreams
Explode.
Most of the time:
Aggression is the best kind of trouble-shooting.”

And I think Meena’s assertion’s in the forms of dream, in the forms of poetry will come a long way, and we will bring a sort of realization in the course of time.

With this we come to the end of this lecture, and once again repeating what Meena says, Aggression is the best kind of troubles-hooting. So, with this let me come to the end of this talk.

Thank you very much I wish you all a good day.