

Chapter 8

Touching to Transgress and Transgressing to Touch: The Dalit Female Sexuality in Meena Kandasamy's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Dalit feminist poet and author Meena Kandasamy's poetry collections Touch (2006) and Ms. Militancy (2010) are daring explorations of how the flesh can inscribe its desires in all of its impulsive and unhindered spontaneity in the text – tender and violent at the same time, with the text treading across wired fences of gendered and segregated spaces only to return back to the flesh. This chapter acknowledges Sangari and Vaid's sociological insight into how women's sexuality has served as a pivotal gateway for the maintenance of caste-based and sex-based inequalities and attempts to critically explore the pathway Kandasamy cuts to overturn the Dalit female body's very trajectory of "utility" in a society obsessed with purity and patriarchal hegemony. Locating Kandasamy in the socio-political matrix to read her poetry, an inter-disciplinary approach is adopted in scrutinizing the need to study the language she uses in her poetry, taking into purview its apparently "sexually provocative" content and its maneuverings around the notion of "touch" in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

Meena Kandasamy in a recent interview with John Rufo (2015) had gone on to express her belief how languages are biased structures which often contribute in embedding already- inherent inequalities deeper into the societal stratum– What with her poetry being a means of her vocal resistance against caste and gender-based oppression, one need not thus go further to understand therefore as to why the very language of her poetry thus, in both her anthologies *Touch* and *Ms. Militancy* is a drift apart from the mainstream ; replete with images of the corporeal, in all its undressed and unpolished physicality. One might further go on to posit that, it is through this language of flesh and blood without its garb of artificiality, societal regulations and restrictions that Kandasamy (2006) seeks to assemble the marginalized, not to offer them mere lip-service metaphorically but by letting them inscribe themselves with the ‘ink’ of bodily traces on the untouched and inaccessible pages of literary text- Thus evoking, if not completely, but partially, a sense of their suffering in all its physical and literal sense. Locating Kandasamy in the socio-political matrix to read her poetry, one needs to reflect on how being a Dalit female writer, she is thrice removed from mainstream society and her voice when pinned to this location, creates the need to study the language she uses in her poetry by taking into purview its apparent ‘linguistically sexual’ content and its maneuverings around the notion of touch in the text. And it is this very volatility of desire and sexuality which Kandasamy makes advantage of to detonate the very gate-kept rigid boundaries of casteism and sexism controlling the Dalit woman’s body, thus destabilizing the orthodox foundations of sexuality to help strengthen further the stronghold of a Brahminical patriarchy in order. What this paper then attempts at is to navigate how the linguistically sexual language employed by Kandasamy establishes the convergence of the social and the sexual trajectories of this desire to be touched by the Dalit women. There is further reflection on how the realization of this socio-sexual politics makes Kandasamy use the Dalit female body in all its corporeality as the site of her socio-sexual subversion/transgression as a ‘radical’ means to emancipation; with the founding idea being how the extreme corporeal vulnerability of the Dalit female has the radical potential of being a building block for developing an effectively subversive discourse or pathway for emancipatory body politics.

In using a language which is consciously and deliberately fleshly, Kandasamy attempts at a overturning of the Dalit-female body’s very trajectory of ‘utility’ in society. From their bodies being exploited by majoritarian forces as a site of oppression, there is a reclaiming of the same body as a means to active resistance. It is in this context that that one can place Gopal Guru’s (1995) argument in the essay ‘ Dalit Women Talk Differently’ where he goes on to justify the difference in language and tone often used by Dalit women which arises as a voice not just

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