

Militant Women: Body Politics and Desire in Meena Kandasamy's Ms. Militancy

Budagatla Kalyani¹, Dr. N. Solomon Benny²

¹Research scholar, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, India

²Research supervisor, Asst. Professor, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, India

Abstract—Meena Kandasamy's *Ms. Militancy* (2010) poems "Body Politics," "Random Access Man," and "A Cunning Stunt" explore body politics and desire as sites of patriarchal, casteist, and linguistic violence against women. Women's bodies become objects, tied up and renamed from "cunt" to caste-laden "seat," enduring verbal invasion as ongoing sexual control. Desire shifts from marital starvation to bold rebellion, fake coldness and pleasure-seeking turning harm into resistance. Kandasamy uses raw language to expose atrocities, refuse euphemisms, and reclaim body and words from men's judgment. The poems immerse readers in Dalit women's trauma and fight back. This study focuses on body politics and desire but excludes mythology or nationalism, suggesting future work on violence and emancipation.

Index Terms—body politics, desire, sexual violence, Dalit feminism, linguistic domination, patriarchal control, erotic resistance

I. INTRODUCTION

Meena Kandasamy is a new-age modern writer bringing bold topics to the face of the world exposing the reality. She is the first Dalit poetess who says that poetry is empirical truth and her experience is reflected in her writing, illustrating the struggle they carry in society. As a writer, activist and political rhetorician, she uses poetry as a means of power to uncover minor aspects that are often neglected in social order. Meena Kandasamy mainly focuses on caste annihilation, feminism and linguistic identity, and body politics and desire, remaining one of the pioneer and powerful voices of the Dalit feminist medium of thought. In her collections of poems, *Touch*, which was published in 2006, and *Ms. Militancy*, which was published in 2010, she questions the supposedly perfect national culture, tradition, and

history by being powerfully scathing and direct in her attack on the social order. Her poems are a critique of the casteist ideologies and, at large, a protest against elitist sections of the society, which, in the name of honor and dignity, exploit the poorer sections. She says, "Poetry is not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain set of practices while you present your ideas in the way that academic language is." and thus, prefers to use it for her activism. Through her poetry, she has become a spokesperson for silenced women with subdued passions, and the unapologetic force in her poetry is capable of transforming shame into militant assertion. This paper examines Meena Kandasamy's 2010 poetry collection, *Ms. Militancy*. It analyzes how women subjected to disembodiment and denied autonomy by patriarchal norms, with desires both criminalized and muzzled, transform their policed bodies into sites of militant resistance. The poems resurrect stifled longings through themes of love, desire, sexual violence, resistance, subversion, and political violence. Kandasamy's bold style employs vivid imagery to convey these experiences intensely. She acknowledges direct influence from Anne Sexton's *Transformations*, stating in a 2025 interview, "*Ms. Militancy* takes its idea from *Transformations*." This is evident in her virtuosic retelling of corporeality and yearning in poems such as "Backstreet Girls," "Moon Gazers," "Random Access Man," and "A Cunning Stunt."

In the first poem of *Ms. Militancy*'s poetry collection, "A Cunning Stunt," Kandasamy begins by framing provocative lines exposing how language, patriarchy, and power colonize the female body. She dismantles the illusion that the female body is neutral and instead reveals how male discourse controls and silences women under the guise of knowledge. The poem

opens with the speaker “bound in bed and blindfolded,” immediately invoking images of physical vulnerability and sexual domination by men. She hears the words coming from a man, a kind of language that was meant to dominate the discourse, and her vulnerability and powerlessness are depicted as she is deprived of sight and physical agency, rendering the passivity in the situation. The perpetrators' use of language as a tool of manipulation is one of the themes of the poem that reflects domination and control over the female body. The perpetrator's use of Sanskrit terms, while seemingly reverent, is another form of manipulation. He attempts to legitimize his actions by cloaking them in a language of tradition and spirituality, further dehumanizing the speaker, reducing her to a collection of body parts.

I am torn apart to contain the meanings of family, race, stock, and caste and form of existence and stationed by birth (Ms. Millitancy, 36)

The continued redefinition of "cunt" reflects the ongoing assault and the woman's increasing fragmentation. She is being "torn apart" both physically and psychologically by the man's relentless imposition of meaning. The poem concludes with the speaker's desire to escape, though she is physically trapped, and the phrase “I turn rigid” can be interpreted as a physical and emotional response to the trauma, a shutting down of feeling as a means of self-preservation. This final act of resistance suggests a refusal to fully submit to the perpetrator's control. It is a subtle act of defiance, a way of protecting the inner self from being completely consumed by perpetrators' violence. and I can take it no more. Pinned down that way, I cannot walk away. I turn frigid. (Ms. Millitancy, 36).

This poem mirrors the victimization and retaliation over the woman's body and their resistance to sexual assault. The women depicted find ways to resist and protect their inner selves, despite the violence and oppression they face. Meena writes, “I turn faker”, Through their militant actions and defiance of societal norms, these female characters embody a powerful form of insurrection against the patriarchal structures that seek to subjugate them.

In another defiant poem, Meena Kandasamy's women directly confront moral policing, rejecting judgment while reclaiming their bodies through provocative

self-naming that invites scrutiny on their own terms. The poem begins with the speaker defiantly addressing the "moral police," asserting that both men and women should be held to the same standards of propriety. However, the poem starkly reveals how society assigns demeaning labels to women and subjects them to body-shaming, where narrow-minded expectations demand that women conform to rigid ideals of fairness, slimness, and beauty. Kandasamy's speaker fearlessly calls out those who impose moral judgments but fail to apply them equally. By boldly embracing these derogatory labels, the speaker subverts their power, transforming them into declarations of self-acceptance and agency, and further emphasizing the celebration of female sexuality. Ultimately, the speaker's unwavering self-acceptance and body positivity lead to a collective resistance against societal norms, underscoring the vital importance of female solidarity and the immense strength that can be found in unity.

There will be no blood on our bridal beds. We are not the ones you will choose for wives. We are not the ones you can sentence for life. (Ms. Militancy, 14).

The unwavering determination of the women who embrace freedom by defiantly rejecting conventional expectations of marriage and domestic life. Though society may never fully accept their bold, nonconformist stance, they resolutely refuse to cater to societal demands for purity and wifely obedience. Kandasamy powerfully conveys the profound corporeal resilience these women derive from their unapologetic defiance of cultural norms. She says that any woman who is bold enough to deal with criticism and is a shrew starts to refer to herself as one among the women who were victims of moral police, as she says in her interview with Silvia Durate for the Sampsonia Way, “The criticism has also become personal and malicious as well.” She stands by the sides of women who were morally policed with a bond of friendship and sisterhood, and then a direct word of bonding follows that brings out their togetherness when Meena Kandasamy calls them as friends. "And yes, my dears, we are all friends." (Ms. Militancy, 14) In another poem by Meena Kandasamy, she uses the metaphor of moon gazing to explore the evolution of desire from adolescence to adulthood. She includes the themes of curiosity, shame, desire, and longing. In the first stanza, a teenager's curious questions about birds' actions on a new moon represent the inquisitive nature

of mind of the speaker by challenging traditional narratives. But the teacher's response, redirecting the class's attention to the speaker, serves as a form of public shaming. This incident instills a sense of shame and forces the speaker into silence and conformity.

What does that bird do on new moon nights?

Peeved by what she thinks is impudence, The teacher says the bird watches my face. The class turns all at once, stares at me. Ashamed, I shrink, I sit. (Ms. Militancy 33)

In the next stanza, the speaker's focus shifts from intellectual curiosity to romantic longing, and she actively seeks her "coal-black lover," portraying a sense of desire. The speaker's description of sinking into her lover's "limitless eyes" suggests a sense of vulnerability and surrender, which contrasts with earlier defiance, indicating a shift from questioning external narratives to embracing emotional experiences. The final lines of the poem depict the speaker as the moon-gazing bird on new moon nights, singing "the saddest songs," representing a quiet longing and acceptance of absence. Unlike her younger self, she no longer asks questions, suggesting a learned silence and a resignation to the cyclical nature of desire and loss. *Moon Gazers* traces the development of female embodiment, impacted by the complexities of desire, contrasting the outspoken curiosity of adolescence with the quiet yearning of adulthood suggesting a journey from questioning external narratives to navigating internalized bodily discipline.

In the context of militant women, Kandasamy's portrayal of desire as rebellion against patriarchal denial is evident in the poem "Random Access Man," where she vocally reclaims pleasure and weaponizes female sexuality as resistance. The speaker in the first line expresses her denial of marital emptiness and portrays her husband as impotent and performative. So, she seeks fulfillment elsewhere. Culminating in "She picked herself a random man / for that first night of fervour. / This one was all hands and all heads," who satisfies "By the time she left / this stranger's lap / she had learnt / all about love. / First to last" (Ms. Militancy 47). This portrayal of a woman as ordinary asserts her right to pleasure. She devours and transforms inner hunger into empowered choice. Here the desire is militant *jouissance* for the everyday woman shattering repressive norms.

II. CONCLUSION

The poems of Meena Kandasamy delve into the themes of body politics and desire expressing the concern about women body as nexus of patriarchy, casteist and linguistic violence and also weaponizes explicitness, refusing euphemism to assert gynocritical agency ordinary women choosing *jouissance* over restraint, shattering epic chastity and respectability. She exposes the atrocities that women undergo and how her body is treated just as an object by men. Thereby asserting into dalit feminist poetics she reclaims that both body and language should be beyond euphemistic control. The desire in women which is considered to be deeply personal is also being judged and renamed. Sexual violence across her works appears as an ongoing system, where women are tied up, blindfolded woman in "A cunning stunt" suffering verbal invasion and political violence far from physical assault, manifests as systemic linguistic domination intertwined with sexual violence, immersing readers in the victim's embodied trauma and resistive nature, therefore this article, though comprehensive, has some limitations. This study focuses on body politics, desire, resistance, subversion, and their linguistic manifestations, excluding other potential themes like mythology, nationalism, or intertextuality in her broader oeuvre. The limitations of the present study offer scope and recommend avenues for future research in areas such as psychoanalytic trauma theory, intersectional emancipation, performative gender, and socio-political violence.

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