

The Intensity of Resistance: A Comparative Affective Analysis of Meena Kandasamy and Gidla

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Abstract—This paper offers a comparative reading of *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy and *Ants Among Elephants* by Sujatha Gidla through Brian Massumi's theory of affect. It argues that Dalit narratives operate as "expression-events" that privilege intensity over representation, revealing a pre-conscious, affective register of caste trauma. By mapping distinct regional contexts urban Tamil Nadu and the political landscapes of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana the study foregrounds a "triple marginalisation" of caste, class, and gender. Massumi's concept of the autonomy of affect elucidates how caste-based shock precedes cognition, rendering the Dalit body a dynamic site of becoming rather than a fixed social identity.

Index Terms—Dalit Literature; Affect Theory; Brian Massumi; Triple Marginalisation; Incorporeal Materialism

I. INTRODUCTION: THE INCORPOREAL MATERIALISM OF DALIT LITERATURE

The literary cartographies of Meena Kandasamy and Sujatha Gidla do not merely represent the Dalit experience; they instantiate a rupture in the representational economy of the marginalised subject. This paper focuses on a comparative analysis of Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* through the rigorous ontological prism of Brian Massumi's theory of affect. By situating Kandasamy's narrative within the claustrophobic urban Brahminical patriarchy of Tamil Nadu and Gidla's account within the expansive, historical Communist trajectories of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, we discern a "triple marginalisation" of caste, class, and gender that transcends mere sociological data.

The paper posits that these texts function as "expression-events." They strike the reader through "intensity" rather than "signification," effectively bypassing traditional ideological frameworks to register a visceral reality of Dalit existence that is "real but abstract" the dimension of the Virtual (Massumi, 2002). In these narratives, the "passage precedes the position," rendering the Dalit body as a site of dynamic becoming rather than a static point on a social grid.

Theoretical Framework: Brian Massumi's "Autonomy of Affect"

To grasp the resistance inherent in these narratives, one must synthesise Massumi's distinction between Affect and Emotion. Affect is unqualified intensity: an asubjective, non-conscious, and autonomous state of potential that exists before cognitive capture. Conversely, Emotion is a qualified intensity; it is the sociolinguistically fixed, subjective version of affect that is owned and recognised by a person (Massumi, 2002). Affect is the "Virtual" potentiality of the body, while Emotion is its "Actual" capture.

"Intensity is a state of suspense, a temporal sink, or a hole in time that disrupts linear narrative and narrative progress. It is a vibrant motion that is not yet directed toward practical ends but remains a state of passion." (Massumi, 2002).

Massumi's analysis of the "missing half-second" experiment provides a vital justification for this framework. Brain activity occurs 0.3 seconds before a conscious decision is registered, with the full sensation requiring half a second to be perceived. In the context of Dalit trauma, this "caste-shock" happens in the body as an incorporeal materialism before the "Dalit-subject" can even claim it as "my pain." This autonomic reaction precedes the conscious,

ideological reading of oppression. The intensity of the shock is a "temporal sink" where the body registers the blow before the mind can categorise it into the "qualified" emotions of sadness or anger.

Regional Cartographies: Tamil Nadu vs. Andhra Pradesh/Telangana

The following table delineates the divergent affective landscapes through which the Dalit body moves.

Regional Affective Grids

Tamil Nadu (When I Hit You)	Andhra Pradesh/Telangana (Ants Among Elephants)
Affective Focus: Domestic claustrophobia; the "stiff confinement" of abuse within urban Brahminical patriarchy.	Affective Focus: The expansive "Movement-Vision" of historical Communist struggle and rural-to-urban displacement.
Intensity Generation: Produced through the "shock" of the domestic "rig" and the isolation of the academic setting.	Intensity Generation: Produced through the systemic "ants among elephants" metaphor, the passage through political landscapes.
Grid Operation: The "mirror-vision" of a specific, localised marital script that seeks to arrest the subject.	Grid Operation: The "stop-operations" of mainstream ideologies (Marxism/Nationalism) that fail to address caste.
Becoming: Stasis as a site of internalised, quivering potentiality.	Becoming: Displacement as the primary mode of ontogenesis and political passage.

Massumi argues that "positionality" on these regional grids treating race, caste, or gender as static points fails to capture the "movement" and "becoming" of the protagonists (Massumi, 2002). These grids are retrospective "stop-operations." Kandasamy and Gidla demonstrate that their characters are not merely "pinned" to these sites but are in a constant state of "self-departure," proving that the virtual potential of the Dalit body always escapes the grid's capture.

The Visceral Text: "When I Hit You" as Intensity
 Kandasamy's narrative functions as a "shock" to the system, mirroring what Massumi terms "The Bleed" the point where the "body meets the image" (Massumi, 2002). The physical abuse inflicted upon the protagonist is the moment her flesh meets the rigid image of the "submissive wife" role, causing a systemic breakdown that cannot be captured by narrative continuity.

The protagonist's survival is predicated on the adoption of an "actor-persona," a concept Massumi explores through Ronald Reagan as a "communicative jerk." Like the "bad actor" who uses "interruption and suspense" rather than fluid content, Kandasamy's protagonist uses the "actor-persona" to survive the "stiff confinement" of her domestic rig. She detaches her "mirror-vision" (how she is seen by the abuser) from her "movement-vision" (the internal intensity of survival).

The protagonist survives by folding the outside world into the body through specific sensations:

- Tactile vs. Proprioceptive Sensing: She registers the blow to the skin (tactile) but survives through

"proprioception" the sensibility of muscles and ligaments at a medium depth. This "muscular memory" allows her to create a "quasi-corporeal map" of survival skills.

- The Infolding of Contact: She translates the "surface of contact" of abuse into an internalised intensity, allowing her to exist in a state of "suspended animation" while her body is subjected to violence.

- The Existential Cry: Her resistance culminates in "expressions" that are pre-conceptual cries of the flesh that register the event as "short of actual" but entirely real in their affective power (Massumi, 2002)
 Historical Movement: "Ants Among Elephants" and the Quasi-Corporeal

In Sujatha Gidla's work, the Dalit experience is framed through "Movement-Vision." The text captures the "passage" of the Dalit body across the political and geographical landscapes of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. This is a "quasi-corporeal" history, where the relationality of the Dalit body to the state and the Communist Party is extracted from its static terms.

Gidla's prose highlights the failure of "Mainstream Ideologies" like Marxism or Nationalism. In Massumi's terms, these ideologies function as "grids" or "stop-operations" (Massumi, 2002). The Communist Party's failure to address caste is a "gridlock" that attempts to freeze the "vibratory motion" of Dalit liberation into stilted poses of party loyalty. The Dalit body, however, remains an

"incorporeal remainder" that these ideological grids cannot contain.

The prose achieves a "synesthetic sensibility" or "mesoperception." It translates historical data the migration of families, the splintering of factions into a "fleshly" memory. The "ants among elephants" metaphor is not a static symbol but a register of "intensity" and "force" where the small body navigates the "action at a distance" of larger systemic powers. Gidla translates the "missing half-second" of historical trauma into a quivering, "fleshly" account of struggle.

Comparative Synthesis: Triple Marginalisation and the Failure of the Grid Commonalities of Affective Resistance

The Collapse of Structured Distinction: Both authors collapse the binary of "happy-sad." Following Massumi's "Snowman Experiment," where children found "sad" scenes pleasant due to arousal (Massumi, 2002), the "sadness" of Dalit literature is an intensive arousal of resistance that the social grid cannot categorise. The intensity of survival is a "passion" that is neither active nor passive.

The Incorporeal Remainder: The characters exist "outside expectation and adaptation." They represent a "never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder" of caste resistance. Even when the social grid (caste laws) attempts to arrest them, a "force of potential" remains that exists as a virtual escape from the actual.

Transduction and Feedback: Socially determined "grids" (gender, caste, class) feed back into the "virtual potential" of the characters. This feedback does not merely reinforce the grid; it initiates a "qualitative transformation," where the characters use the very tools of their oppression to invent new "paths of becoming."

Justification: Why Affect Theory is Essential for Dalit Literature

Traditional "reflective" literary criticism, which Massumi likens to "mirror-vision," is insufficient for the study of Dalit literature. Such criticism reduces the "vibratory motion" of Dalit suffering to "stilted poses" in a "family album" of sociology (Massumi, 2002). To treat the Dalit body as an object to be "decoded" is to participate in its arrest.

By applying Massumi's "Parables," we recognise that Dalit writing is an "inventive" act a "productivism" that adds "new potential" to the world. Kandasamy and Gidla are not simply mirroring a pre-existing reality of oppression; they are triggering a process of "complexifying self-organisation." They move beyond the "negative critique" of debunking caste to the "affirmative method" of fostering new intensities of existence. The Dalit text is an engine of transduction, transmitting the force of potential across the actualised structures of society.

Different Things That Act the Same

- **Regional Tragedies:** While the Kilvenmani massacre (Tamil Nadu) and the Naxalite movement (Andhra Pradesh) are historically distinct, both function as "affective intensities" that strike the reader with raw pain and anger before conscious processing.

- **Regional Caste Labels:** Whether dealing with the Mala-Madiga hierarchy in the South or the Namasudra-Refugee identity in Bengal, these act the same by creating "double" or "triple burdens" of marginalisation that cannot be escaped through economic mobility.

- **Physical Trauma:** Gidla's account of medical negligence during her mother's surgery and Kandasamy's depictions of domestic abuse both function as Massumi's "intensity", autonomic bodily reactions that suspend linear narrative and force a "re-evaluation" of social reality.

- **The Act of Writing:** For both, writing functions as agency, transforming "shame or disgust" into "insurrectionary pride" and providing a "counter-history" against dominant narratives.

II. THE ROLE OF AFFECT THEORY

- **Intensity over Content:** Affect acts as the "intensity", the strength or duration of an image's effect on the reader, which is not always logically connected to its sociolinguistic content. In Dalit literature, this means the raw impact of humiliation strikes the reader's body before they consciously process the historical facts.

- **The "Missing Half-Second":** Massumi describes a "missing half-second" where the body registers an

impulse before the mind qualifies it as an emotion. This framework helps explain the "anubhava" (direct experience) of Dalit writers, where the pain and trauma are immediately embodied and then "backdated" into a narrative of resistance.

- A Trigger for Change: Affect is a "trigger-force" that can induce a global qualitative change. Writing acts as a transducer, taking the energy of past oppression and converting it into "insurrectionary pride" or "revolutionary mentality".

How it enriches Our Knowledge

- Understanding the "Unassimilable": Traditional literature often conforms to "authorial decorum," but affect theory highlights the unassimilable elements, such as the "anguish and anger", that escape conventional structure to force a re-evaluation of social reality.

- Reclaiming Agency: By focusing on affect, we see that writing is not just "reporting" on struggle; it is an act of agency that utilises "casual power" to intervene in the world. It transforms a "devalued social category" into a potent, self-affirming identity through the sheer intensity of the narrative.

- Bridging the Individual and Collective: Affect theory allows us to see Dalit narratives as a "collective voice". The "too-muchness" of the struggle isn't just a personal feeling; it is a "world-glue" of shared experience that unifies the community against the "monster" of the caste system

III. CONCLUSION: BEYOND SIGNIFICATION

While the regional specificities of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh provide different "affective grids," there is a "dynamic unity" in the Dalit experience portrayed by Kandasamy and Gidla. Both authors demonstrate that Passage Precedes Position. The Dalit body is not a fixed point on a map of caste; it is the "interval" of change itself, an incorporeal materialism that resists the "stop-operations" of the state and the patriarchy.

Ultimately, these texts move the reader not through the "meaning" of their sentences or the mere signification of suffering but also through the "intensity" of the "expression-event." They register a reality that

remains "short of actual" yet is entirely real in its ability to affect and be affected. Kandasamy and Gidla have succeeded in creating a "systemic openness," ensuring that the Dalit affective experience remains unassimilable to the structures that seek to contain it.

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