
DOUBLE OPPRESSION IN "GYPSY GODDESS" AND "WHEN I HIT YOU" BY MEENA KANDASAMY

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Abstract:

Meena Kandasamy's debut novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*, is a groundbreaking work inspired by the Kilvenmani massacre. It portrays the struggles, hardships, and injustices faced by a group of Dalit agricultural laborers. Through its innovative postmodern structure, the novel addresses issues of caste and gender dynamics in Indian society, exploring themes of caste eradication, feminism, and linguistic identity.

Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, explores the oppression of women within patriarchal, educated families. The story follows a highly educated Indian woman from a wealthy background who marries a respected college professor. Despite his public persona as a social rights activist, he abuses her at home. Kandasamy presents a harrowing portrayal of her husband's tactics to control her and delves into the emotional struggles of a woman trying to adapt to her domestic situation. Through this narrative, Kandasamy aims to highlight the woman's plight and resilience, emphasizing her humanity and strength despite adversity. The novel provides a striking commentary on the power dynamics between men and women within Indian families and beyond.

This paper aims to explore the challenges, struggles, and resilience of women depicted in the novels. It posits that women experience double oppression: one based on class and the other on gender.

Keywords:feminism, double oppression, patriarchal norms, subjugation.

Double Oppression in Gypsy Goddess

Introduction

In Meena Kandasamy's novel *The Gypsy Goddess*, the concept of double oppression is essential to understanding the novel's exploration of social and systemic injustices. Double oppression reveals how individuals or groups endure multiple, intersecting layers of discrimination and marginalization. The novel is set against the

backdrop of real historical events, especially the Kilvenmani massacre of 1968, where Dalit laborers were brutally killed by landlords in Tamil Nadu, India. This massacre resulted from ongoing caste-based violence and exploitation, intersecting with issues of caste, class, and gender. In this context, double oppression refers to the compounded suffering of individuals, particularly Dalit women, who are marginalized not only by their class but also by their gender.

Class Oppression: The Economic Exploitation of Marginalized Groups

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the caste system is intricately connected to class issues, as the economic marginalization of Dalits is a direct result of their caste status. The novel portrays the severe poverty endured by the Dalit community, which is worsened by their lack of land and resources.

Landlords from the upper castes hold significant economic power over the Dalits, exploiting their labor and perpetuating their poverty. This economic exploitation represents a form of class oppression that operates alongside caste oppression, further subjugating the Dalit community and reinforcing their marginalization.

Kandasamy demonstrates how the economic vulnerability of Dalits makes them particularly susceptible to exploitation and violence. The novel details how landlords exploit this vulnerability by manipulating wages, controlling access to vital resources, and employing violence to crush any attempts by laborers to resist. The Kilvenmani massacre, in particular, was a brutal response to the laborers' efforts to organize and demand fair wages, underscoring the lethal consequences of challenging the economic status quo. Through this depiction, the novel highlights the deep connection between caste and class oppression, revealing how the economic subjugation of Dalits is both rooted in and reinforced by their caste status.

Gender Oppression: The Unique Struggle of Women

While caste and class oppression are central themes in the novel, Kandasamy also highlights the gendered aspect of this oppression, emphasizing the double marginalization of Dalit women. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Dalit women bear the dual burden of caste and gender discrimination. They are portrayed as some of the most vulnerable members of their community, facing sexual violence and exploitation not only from men of the dominant caste but also from within their own community. Additionally, these women are subjected to domestic abuse, further compounding their suffering and making them even more marginalized within an already oppressed group.

The novel's depiction of gender oppression is striking, illustrating how Dalit women are trapped in a cycle of violence that permeates both their public and private lives. In the public domain, they are frequently subjected to sexual violence by upper-caste men, a prevalent form of caste-based violence intended to assert dominance and humiliate the Dalit community. This violence often goes unpunished, as the legal and social systems are skewed in favor of the upper castes. In their private lives, Dalit

women endure domestic abuse, driven by the combined pressures of poverty and caste oppression, which reinforce patriarchal norms within their own community.

Kandasamy's narrative highlights the experiences of Dalit women, showcasing their resilience and resistance despite facing significant challenges. At the same time, the novel critiques broader social justice movements for frequently neglecting or marginalizing the specific issues faced by Dalit women. By concentrating on their struggles, *The Gypsy Goddess* emphasizes the importance of an intersectional approach to social justice, one that addresses the distinct difficulties encountered by women at the crossroads of caste, class, and gender.

Intersectionality: The Overlapping Dynamics of Class and Gender

The Gypsy Goddess stands as a compelling example of intersectionality in literature, illustrating how caste, class, and gender oppressions are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Kandasamy's depiction of double oppression underscores that the challenges faced by Dalit women cannot be separated from the broader issues of caste and class exploitation. The novel stresses that addressing the injustices faced by the Dalit community requires acknowledging the gendered aspects of this oppression.

Furthermore, the novel critiques how mainstream feminist and social justice movements often overlook the intersectional nature of oppression. Kandasamy points out that these movements can unintentionally contribute to the marginalization of Dalit women by focusing narrowly on issues of gender or class without considering their intersection with caste. Through this critique, *The Gypsy Goddess* advocates for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to social justice that addresses the complexities of double oppression.

Double Oppression in "When I hit you"

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* explores the double oppression faced by a woman in an abusive marriage. The novel shows how gender-based violence is connected to social and economic factors. Kandasamy's book criticizes both the personal injustice of domestic violence and the larger societal problems that contribute to it.

In her biographical novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife*, Meena Kandasamy explores the lives of two unnamed individuals from contrasting backgrounds. The narrator, a young writer from a middle-class family, marries a man of higher social standing who is a college professor. This marriage is the husband's second attempt at wedded life after a previous union with someone of a similar social status ended in failure. Over time, the husband exerts control and dominance over his wife.

Soon after their marriage, the husband begins to invade the wife's privacy by demanding access to her email and social media accounts. He believes that this transparency will enhance their intimacy. Once he has access, he removes all her professional contacts, undermining her work as a writer. Throughout their marriage,

the husband is highly critical of the wife's use of language, attempting to belittle her. As a feminist writer, she recognizes his efforts to demean her and feels that their relationship has deteriorated into one of antagonism rather than companionship. Ultimately, this escalating conflict leads the wife to flee from her husband, abandoning the marriage.

Class Dynamics – Exploitation and Dependence

In *When I Hit You*, socio-economic factors also play a crucial role in the protagonist's struggles. Her financial reliance on her husband significantly contributes to her victimization. The novel demonstrates how her lack of economic independence heightens her susceptibility to abuse. This dependency restricts her capacity to leave the abusive relationship, as she does not have the financial resources or support needed to make a change.

Kandasamy portrays the protagonist's financial situation as a crucial element of her oppression. Her economic dependence on her husband not only sustains her victimization but also limits her ability to seek assistance or change her situation. This financial exploitation is closely linked with gender oppression, weaving a complex network of abuse that is challenging to escape. The novel highlights how financial limitations intensify the protagonist's vulnerability, demonstrating the intersection of class and gender in her experiences of violence.

Gender Oppression: The Basis of Domestic Violence

At the heart of *When I Hit You* lies the persistent issue of gender-based oppression. The novel vividly portrays the protagonist's life as a series of physical and emotional abuses inflicted by her husband. This portrayal is both raw and unrelenting, underscoring the intensity and regularity of the violence she faces. Her experiences reflect entrenched patriarchal norms that normalize and sustain violence against women. Kandasamy presents domestic abuse not as an isolated personal issue but as a systemic problem deeply embedded in societal attitudes that devalue and subordinate women.

The novel examines how the protagonist's gender defines her role within both the family and society, trapping her in a cycle of violence that affects her both privately and publicly. This gender-based oppression is perpetuated by cultural norms and societal expectations that pressure women to accept and endure abuse as part of their marital obligations. The protagonist's suffering is a direct outcome of these pervasive and institutionalized patriarchal values, which make it exceedingly difficult for her to escape the abuse or seek assistance.

Intersection of Class and Gender Oppression

The novel vividly illustrates how the intersections of gender and class oppression exacerbate the protagonist's suffering. The overlap between these forms of oppression creates a compounded impact, amplifying the abuse she endures due to her economic vulnerability. Her lack of financial independence and societal support stems directly from her gender, as patriarchal norms limit her opportunities and autonomy.

When I Hit You emphasizes the complexity of the protagonist's plight by showcasing how her experiences of suffering are shaped by both her gender and economic status. The novel underscores that understanding her situation requires acknowledging the combined effects of these oppressions. This intersectional approach reveals the systemic nature of domestic violence, where socio-economic and gender-based factors work together to perpetuate her victimization.

Conclusion

Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* offers a profound examination of the double oppression experienced by Dalit women at the crossroads of class and gender. Through her vivid and unflinching depiction of the Kilvenmani massacre and its aftermath, Kandasamy illuminates the systemic violence that upholds class structures within Indian society. The novel underscores the necessity of an intersectional approach to justice that acknowledges the compounded suffering faced by individuals marginalized on multiple fronts. By amplifying the voices of Dalit women, Kandasamy urges readers to confront the stark realities of double oppression and to rethink how social justice movements can be more inclusive and effective in addressing the needs of all marginalized groups. This thorough exploration of double oppression in *The Gypsy Goddess* underscores its importance as a literary work that critiques historical injustices while advocating for a more intersectional and inclusive approach to contemporary justice.

When I Hit You offers a profound exploration of double oppression, showing how the intersection of gender and socio-economic factors influences the protagonist's experiences of domestic violence. The novel's depiction of these complex layers of oppression highlights the need for an intersectional approach to understanding and tackling domestic abuse. Kandasamy's work encourages readers to face the harsh realities of double oppression and to support more inclusive and effective social justice movements that address the needs of all marginalized communities.

By thoroughly analyzing the interaction between gender and class oppression, *When I Hit You* underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing the compounded nature of abuse. The novel calls for a more nuanced perspective on domestic violence, stressing the necessity for responses that account for all the contributing factors to an individual's suffering.

Both novels vividly illustrate that double oppression can only be comprehensively understood by examining the intersections of different forms of discrimination. Kandasamy's work underscores the importance of addressing these overlapping oppressions to develop more effective and inclusive solutions. By exposing the complexities of class and gender-based oppression, Kandasamy urges readers to confront the harsh realities of double oppression and to advocate for social

justice movements that are both thorough and responsive to the diverse experiences of marginalized individuals.

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