

**The Impact of Marxism and Communism: A Critical Study of
Meena Kandaswamy's 'The Gypsy Goddess'**

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Abstract

Meena Kandasamy is a versatile writer from India who writes poetry, essays and fiction. She was born to Tamil parents in 1984. Meena Kandasamy completed a doctorate of philosophy in socio-linguistics from Anna university, Chennai. She was very interested in writing from her childhood and even wrote her first poetry at the age of 17 before translating books by Dalit writers. Kilvenmani, an obscure village in the Nagapattinam taluk of erstwhile Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, shot to significance in 1968, forty-four Dalit were, locked in a hut and burnt alive because they demanded for hike in wages. This study is an attempt to analyze the events, looking at it not in isolation, but by placing it in the larger socio – political scenario, by examining the various narratives of the incident itself, the aftermath, and the emotions and movements it spurred among the people based on the novel *The Gypsy Goddess* by Meena Kandasamy taking Marxism and communism as its main theme.

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Keywords – Communism, Marxism, Politics, Caste System, Oppression

Introduction

The Gypsy Goddess is based on a massacre that took place in the village of Kilvenmani on Christmas day, 1968, the time when Marxist ideology was gaining popularity among disenfranchised Dalit who were shedding their sweat and blood on the paddy fields in brutal conditions. They toiled away on rice paddies. They toiled more than they filled their stomach. The demand for the raise in the measure by the labourers led to the conflict. Farm workers struck work as the landlords murder a popular communist leader (Sikkal Pakkirisamy). The landlords try to bully them back. But the hungry people of Kilvenmani stay still in their demand for justice. To end this strick the landlords send goon squads to attack Kilvenmani. As a result of this they end up with the death of 42 villagers who had been burnt into unrecognizable corpses. Others who have lost, loved ones in the massacre were sent to jail. The above acts are rooted from capitalist ideologies which are against Marxism. The Author Meena Kanthaswamy has done a fabulous job to bring out the capitalist world problems.

Critical Study of Meena Kandaswamy's 'The Gypsy Goddess'

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Meena Kandasamy bridges the gap between fiction and critique. She has blended the historical documents with storytelling style. "Truth is so hard to tell, it sometimes needs fiction to make it plausible."(Bacon 53). The quotes of Bacon from his essay *Of Truth* mirror the novel *The Gypsy Goddess*.

"The struggle of man against power is the Struggle of memory against forgetting" (Kundera 81). The struggle of Dalit people in the society is against their own race. The Dalit are the most suppressed people of the society. The word Dalit may be derived from Sanskrit

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and means “Ground”, “Suppressed”, “crushed” or “broken to pieces”. The Dalit peoples were called as “Untouchables”. One among them can feel the agony of being untouched. Bama is one of the Tamil writers who has put light on the life of Dalit in one of her famous Novel “Karukku”. Karukku reflects her pain of being a Dalit and treated as untouchable by upper class people. Bama’s writing celebrates Dalit women’s subversive strategies to overcome their oppression. Bama through her writings evokes the world to vie the agony of Dalit people. The communism would base on the common ownership of the means of the absence of social classes, money, and the state. The common thinking of the communist writers is to create classless society. They believe that this will happen if the people take away the power of the bourgeoisie and create a dictatorship of the proletariat. The major issues of India as casteism, politics, Marxism and communism are the back born of the novel *The Gypsy Goddess*. Land and labour were the sites upon which these contests - of caste and class, in Kilvenmani played out. In 1960’s, Thanjavur district also known as the *Rice Bowl of Tamil Nadu*, accounted for almost one third of the state’s paddy production. A mere 4 per cent of the cultivating household held almost 26 per cent of the cultivated land under their control. Meena Kandaswamy carefully includes the problems of caste system through the above incidents.

The communist party who were gaining the popularity among the lower caste people stood against the Paddy Producers Association. The opposition of the communist raised the agony of the upper hands. Meetings were arranged and discussions were held to step against the communist party. When the strike on hand and the association on the another hand was simultaneously runner in its speed, a sudden unexpected death (murder) of Sikkal Pakkirisamy by the landlords made an impulsive twist in the story line of the people of Kilvenmani. This led to a huge clutter in the common life of the people. The upper caste

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landlords were totally against the labourers they formed a meeting in order to bring them under their control. Gopalakrishna Naidu plays a major role. He reflects the hatred and dominating character of the upper caste landlord on the whole. Most of his speech delivered to the members of the Paddy Production Association presents the superiority of landlord.

Kilvenmani was turning to the land of communism. On the other side the landlords were beating hard to abolish the communism from the village of Kilvenmani. The Landlords consider communist party to be their enemies, who were making the labourers against them. The thought of landlords about the communist party was flourished out from the nature of Gopalakrishna Naidu who plays a dominant role in the novel.

Communism is actually a killer disease that has infested agriculture. It is worse than blight. Just like curtailing an unruly goat from causing damage to his crops, it is the duty of every farmer to suitable preventive action against the communists. This party is a curse upon the human race. It is the only party that seeks to divide us, set us one against another and make us enemies.

(Kandasamy 136)

The novel *The Gypsy Goddess* completely adopts the theory of Marxism and communism. The dark night of the Kilvenmani starts all with the Marxism and Communism. The labourer's who toiled hard on the fields of the landlords were paid very less which was not sufficient to fill their stomach. The labourers demanded extra wages to fill their stomach which was sorely rejected by the Paddy Association. This let the hands of the communist to let inside in order to get the rights back for the lower caste people. The landlords were successive in clearing half of the communist from their path and bring back the labours.

When the left communist kisans started taking out the protests, claiming wages above the mamool wages, the Association refused to comply and instead tried to arm – twist the

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landless labourers into withdrawing from the communist parties and becoming a part of Paddy Producers Association. When the labourers resisted, the Association brought workers from outside for harvest. The local labourers tried to prevent the outsiders from working in the fields. Pakkirisami Pillai, a labourer from outside was killed in the clash on the same day of the death of 44 labourers. The landlords were arrested for the death of labourers who were being burnt ruthlessly. The villagers were arrested for the Murder of Pakkirisami Pillai. The death of single accused who was the reason for the massacre on the night of 25 December, and the death of 44 innocent Dalit people who were turned to charred corpse where equalized by the law.

The role of Marxism and communism on each hand takes the novel to different forms. Both form an important element for the massacre of Kilvenmani on the night of 25th December 1968. On the other side of the novel the impact of politics and its power supporting the upper society had fallen down and stepped backward to manipulate the equality of man before law.

Meena Kandasamy's attempt for a different narrative style is the source for the novels success. Meena Kandasamy with her flawless speech as catch holds the interests of her readers. She in the very beginning confesses to the readers about the book. The expectations of a usual Indian style novel are completely remove from the concept of Kandasamy.

It has no intervention; it has no order, system, sequences, or result; it has no lifeliness, no thrill, no stir, no seeming of reality; its character are confusedly drawn, and by their acts and words they prove that they are; its humor is pathetic; its pathos is funny; its conversations are – oh! Indescribable; its love – scenes odious; its English a crime against the language. (Kandasamy 31)

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Meena Kandasmy concludes her experimental narration and her novel by the recollection of her visit to Thanjavur District. The love and affection she derived from the people of Kilvenmani for Kandasmy has exceeded her than the success of the book *The Gypsy Goddess*.

This book belongs to the people of Kilvenmani. For making me their own. For the glass of water they offered every time I entered their homes. For asking nothing of me. For revisiting the most traumatic day in their memory. For their pride in standing by the red flag. For their faith in the idea of communism. For the enormous sacrifices they have made. (Kandasmy 280)

The word downtrodden reflects the other side of the society “The Untouchables”. The book *The Gypsy Goddess* portrays the Dalit people who were kept a way distance by the landlords in number of ways. Separation of streets, prohibitions of cloths, food, temple etc. the Dalit in the novel not only represents a single person but the entire Indian Dalit community. As the age started changing, the life style of the people started to reflect standard in their life. People educated themselves regardless of caste and community. The Dalits, were also given space to prove their potentiality. The present generation has merged in such a way that people have become hard to recognize by their physical as well as mental conditions. The class and caste discrimination has faded, but still the stains of it are shattered in one or two places.

“Only at the time of her marriage, he realized that the word “forever” is subject to caste compatibility in India.”(Dutta 12). The field of education may raise the SC’s and ST’s by providing number of schemes to profit students and employ, still the caste emerges in the issue of marriage. People giving importance to the caste, and community in the marriage, cause a number of evil incidents in the life of young generation. The death of Ilavarasan of

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Dharmapuri district in the year of 2013 provides a clear evidence of the existence of caste in the life and hearts of people. The cause for his death was caste, as he was in love with a upper caste girl named Dhivya. Caste and class still killing the people the civilization may have hidden the caste and caste from the society but has not totally abolished. The reports of past 20 years prove that the science and educations has failed to destroy the caste system and its effect on people after the incident of Kilvenmani the Dalit were more tortured in the name of caste:

In 1991, a young Dalit graduate, was beaten up after his feet unintentionally touched a Reddy man in a cinema hall. Irked by this, the dominant Reddys of the village massacred 13 Dalit, on December 1997, Ranvir Sena gunned down 58 Dalit at Laxmanpur bathe in relation for the Bara massacre in Gaya. 37 upper caste Bhumihars were killed, on January 5, 2006, Bant Singh, a Dalit sikh, was attacked and severely injured. This was for the active working for the justice for his daughter who was gang raped by the upper caste people of Punjab, on 21 April 2010, 18 Dalit homes was torched and two Dalit were burnt alive. “ There is only one caste... the caste of humanity. There is only one religion... the religion of love. There is only one language... the language of the heart.”(Sai Baba18)

The society and its people develop themselves in many area's but still the poor are poor and rich are still the rich. The lifestyle of people has changed, but the thoughts and views remain equivalent throughout the generation. The field of education has stretched its hand to break the discrimination. Likewise the society and its people can completely destroy the lines of discrimination to make their society ever green without cause of death and issues.

“This caste system had grown by the practice of the son always following the business of the father.”(Vivekananda II). The lines by Vivekananda of the can be changed by the upcoming generation through wide thoughts and deeds. The society may change itself or not

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but in the book *The Gypsy Goddess* Meena Kandasamy has tried harder to change the usual form of novel. This novel is an experimental novel putting forth the history narrative in a postmodern narrative technique involving the elements of Tragedy. The attempt of Kandasamy for reconstruct the history of Kilvenmani has derived an enormous popularity. The readers, who were unaware of the historical incident of Kilvenmani have been made aware of the massacre through her novel.

Conclusion

Meena Kandasamy with the precise lines ends her novel. The Novel pays a great tribute to the people of Kilvenmani. The importance of this narrative voice, however, is in laying out the impossibility of the task at hand of the need to create a separation between author and story. Meena Kandasamy has the compassion to distinguish her limitations in an attempt at representation. The Facebook- using urban, education, middle-class author and narrator is a world away from the villagers who inhabit the novel, as is the form and language into which she is fitting them.

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