The Phenomenal Women: A Comparative Study of the Select Poetry of Maya Angelou and Meena Kandasamy

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Outline of the Research

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Introduction:

Researcher has attempted to do the study of history of American Literature, to know the Maya Angelou’s literary Contribution and background. To know this Researcher has studied of the growth of colonial America. The record of colonial America in literature began through exploration and colonization process. European explorers, traders, and settlers wrote their hopes, rare triumphs, and frequent disasters in various, and amazingly rich literary work. Apart from this there were African Negroes in New England, throughout the South America. American civilization took place due to the contribution of all African Negroes. The Renaissance, which began in the Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, soon spread through Western Europe which brought the end of the middle Ages and the beginning of modern civilization in New England.

The New Humanism and the critical spirit of the renaissance in turn give imputes to the Reformation, the religious revolution dominated Western Europe in the sixteenth century which brought the rise of Protestantism and the end of medieval Christianity. The written expression of religious ideas became New England’s great contradiction to the American literature. The Religious ideas were in a biblical style of writing by the American Puritanism had attacked the authority of kings and priests; it had shattered ancient laws and social traditions. At its height, Puritanism served as the dominant force in the creation of American literature. At the stage of decline, the ideas of Puritanism profoundly shaped the way American thought which helped to bring the revolutionary glories of the American Enlightenment and the artistic triumphs of the Age of American Romanticism.
The African American literary studies have been attached to lower-class groups of people. Eighteenth- and nineteenth- century observed, the black writers recorded their fascination with black written forms among them Thomas Jefferson observed that the slaves are the more generally gifted than the whites. Fredrick Douglass took pains in each of his autobiographies to define the meaning of the songs of slaves. The epoch making early landmark anthologies of black literature *The New Negro* (1925), *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931), and *The Negro Caravan* (1941) are included carefully in the form of *Blues* (black songs) and *Stories*. In 1920s and 1930s the works of Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Zora Neale Hurston celebrated *Blues* and *Sermons* to declare the writer’s responsibility to do what they saw in Eliot, Stein, and Joyce did in their arts.

The Black Arts Movement 1960s and 1970s reflected the rising of new group of feminist writers as well as the various fictions of the male-centred black aesthetic group. Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison and Barbara Christian expressed the black oral forms throughout the Americas and in Africa. In 1980s and 1990s many scholars and writers recognized as the black vernacular enormously rich and creative writers. Lawrence Levine, Sterling Stuckey, Albert Murray, Ralph Ellison, Houston A. Baker Jr., Henry Louis Gates Jr., Cheryl Wall, and other paved the way for the ongoing contemporary analysis of the forms as sources for historical and critical insight.

**Maya Angelou** was the black female American-African autobiographer and the poetess of twentieth century. Angelou was a member of the Harlem Writer Guild in the late 1950s. She was active in the Civil Rights movement, and served as Northern Coordinator of Dr. Martin Luther King. She has written the six autobiographical volumes which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences, new kind memories. She was one of the first African American women able to publicly discuss her personal life. She was highly respected as a spokesperson for Black people and women. Angelou’s work is often characterized as autobiographical fiction. She made a deliberate attempt to challenge the common structure of the autobiography by critiquing, changing, and expanding the genre.
Her books are centered on themes such as identity, family and racism. One of the milestone works is *I know why the caged Bird Sings* (1969). It is her first and most highly acclaimed work; it brought her an international recognition for a National Book Award. *Just Give Me a cool Drink of Water ‘Fore I Diiie* (1971), is her a Volume of poetry which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. *Oh pray my wings are Gonna fit me well* (1975), *And Still I Rise* (1978) are also her famous anthologies.

**Dalit Literature:**

The researcher tries to do the study of Dalit Literature to know the literary background and contribution of Meena Kandasamy. The saint’s timeless literature at first assuaged the women and the shudras with mere sympathy. They did not struggle against caste discrimination and for the deliverance of the untouchables. *Mokshka* seemed more important to them, compared to social problems. Though, in theory, the Dalit saints were equal at the doors of the gods, in practice, they were confined to the age-old lowest rank of the ladder. The helplessness of the Dalit saint writers signified by this situation; infuriates today’s Dalit writers. Because of the caste system, Dalit writers have broken away from Hindu culture. It is therefore natural that they feel a distance from the saints. The difference between the contemporary Dalit writers and the saint’s literature is not just a temporal difference; it is also the result of the cultural transformation that has taken place since the time of the saints. Dalit writers reject the established tradition. This does not mean that they do not have a tradition. They claim the tradition of Buddha, Kabir, Phule and Ambedkar. Cultural and tradition develop through the exchange of the new and the old, breaking the bounds of time.

A new rebel tradition is born out of the negation of the old. This rebel tradition has material knowledge of its own existence. It receives the endorsement of a large group, and acquires an independent existence. Eventually this new stream becomes an invisible part of culture. Dalit literature deals with suffering, sorrow, anxieties, agonies, and bitter experiences of injustices form their ancient to the
contemporary age. The label *Dalit Literature* supposed to be the literature of caste system and untouchability. Dalit Literature is not only for the specific caste people it also include the other caste people’s same bitter experiences, suffering, sorrow, anxieties, agonies, against upper caste people’s exploitation. Dalit Literature is related with full of sorrows and struggles of Dalit people to exist and stable the life. To struggle is their life, without struggle they have not their existence of life. At each and every steps of life they must struggle. Their struggle is not only for money sake but their primary struggle at first to complete hunger (Daily Livelihood), because they have not any wealth which left from their parents. Their experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles are related in the lowest strata of society. Injustice and exploitation, Bitter experiences of caste system committed with life.

There are a number of notable Dalit narratives which came into existence and brought to our notice the slavery inflicted upon Dalits, tribal and nomads. The prominent Dalit autobiographies are Shankarrao Kharat’s *Taral Antaral*, P. E. Sonkamble’s *Athavaniche Pakshi*, Daya Pawar’s *Balut*, Madhav Kondvilkar’s *Mukkam Post Devache Gothane*, Uttam Bandu Tupe’s *Katya Varchi Pote*, Keshav Meshram’s *Hakikat Ani Jatayu*, Rusatm Achalkhamb’s *Gavki*, Sharankumar Libale’s *Akkarmashi*, Laxman Mane’s *Upara*, Laxman Gaikwad’s *Uchalya*, Kishore Kale’s *Kolhatyache Por*, Nanasaheb Zodge’s *Phanjar*, Dadasaheb More’s *Gabal*, Narendra Jadhav’s *Aamcha Bap Ani Aamhi*. Apart from Dalit male autobiographies, there are some Dalit women autobiographies reflected their own world of oppression and humiliation. They are Baby Kamble’s *Jina Aamuch*, Shanstabai Kamble’s *Mazya Janmachi Chittatharak Katha*, Janabai Gire’s *Marankala*, Urmila Pawar’s *Aayadan* and Kumud Pawde’s *Antasphot*. These outstanding Dalit women autobiographies enriched the world of Dalit Literature by providing the real status of marginalized communities. The realistic account of nomadic tribes is vividly narrated in the form of the notable autobiographies of Nomadic Tribes such as Laxman Mane’s *Upara* (1978), Dadasaheb More’s *Gabal* (1983), Laxman Gaikwad’s *Uchalya* (1984), Vaijnath Kalase’s *Aairanichya Ghana* (1984), Bhimrao Gasti’s *Berad* (1984), Gulab Waghmare’s *Ranliri* (1986), Atmaram Rathod’s

These autobiographies of nomadic writers are notable in Marathi Dalit Literature. These nomadic autobiographies narrated the graph of sorrows and pains. The writers of these communities were the representative of their own community. These writers narrated their own world of experience realistically. They also dared to reveal the age old habits of their own community. They narrated traditional beliefs, rituals, festivals and *Jatpanchayat*.

**Meena Kandasamy** is a Dalit writer, poet and translator based in Chennai. Two of her poems *Mascara* and *My Lover speaks of Rape* have own the first prize in pan-Indian alternative English magazine of the Dalit Media Network in its first year of Publication poetry contests. Her poems have been published widely in India and abroad through journals like *The Little Magazine*, *Cerebration*, *Indian Horizons*, *Muse India*, *Great Works*, *Slow Trains* and the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*. She was the editor of *The Dalit*, a bimonthly from 2001-2002. It was a noteworthy media initiative that provided a platform to record atrocities, condemn oppressive hierarchies and document the forgotten heritage. As a woman writer who dreams of a casteless India, she has contributed quite a few book chapters and research articles in various journals such as *Biblio*, *Communalism Combat* and so on. She has translated more than a dozen books that run into over 1,500 pages. Significant among her translations are the writings and speeches of Thol. Thirumaavalavan (*Talisman: Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation* (2003) and *Uproot Hindutva: the Fiery Voice of the Liberation Panther* (2004), *Samya, Kol Kota*) and the poetry and fables of Tamil Eelam poet Kasi Anandan. She has published two collections of poetry namely, *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010). She published recently a novel *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014).

**Objectives of the study:**

- To study the influence of the society, culture, economy and religion Black and Dalit Women nurtured in.
• To investigate the cause and consequence of the degradation of the women.

• To find out the ways mode and method the women adopted in tackling the oppressive forces.

• To study the tone and temper of their answer to the subjugation.

Scope of the study:

The research has been focused, with the perspective identified, on the select poetry of the authors in question. The poetical works of Maya Angelou taken for the study are Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘Fore I Diie, Oh pray my wings are Gonna fit me well, And still I Rise whereas the collections of poetry taken for the study of Meena Kandasamy are Touch, and Mrs. Militancy barring their all other works.

Importance of study:

The works chosen for study though written in the post-colonial American-African era and the post-independence Indian era, however, their roots are deeply fixed in racism, classism, casteism and Patriarchy in the modern era. The vast majority of American-African Black Women and Indian Dalit Women were treated as secondary and subhuman. The Comparative study explains socio-political and patriarchal ethos of American-African Black Women society and Indian Dalit Women society. This study will be inspired and motivated the readers. In the wider sense it is related with the subalternity of the marginal world. It also explores authenticity, Patriarchy and gender issues.

Method of the study:

The select primary data of the authors have been taken up for the study; it is analyzed through the descriptive and comparative modes. The proposed work does not require any practical or field work. The secondary texts, journals, magazines and web based material have been consulted.
Chapter Scheme:

Chapter I: Introduction

In the introductory chapter, the present researcher has attempted to demonstrate the historical bird’s eyes view of the literatures in America and India; in his study he has concentrated on the contribution of the women poets to the field of literature. The researcher also tried to analyze that the social tempers influenced through the processes of race, color, class, caste, and every kind of slavery existed in both the geographical locations.

Chapter II: Portrayal of Race, Color and Patriarchy by Maya Angelou

In the second chapter, the researcher has attempted to analyze the nature of race, color, slavery and patriarchy on the society of blacks in America in general and of the black woman in particular. At the same time, an attempt has been made to interpret the worth and vigor of the poetic responses depicted in the poetry of Maya Angelou.

Chapter III: Portrayal of Caste and Patriarchy by Meena Kandasamy

In the third chapter, the researcher has attempted to have a critical look at the select poetry of Meena Kandasamy. The aspect, how caste and patriarchy based discrimination affected the life of Dalit woman, has been focused of attention in the poetry of Meena Kandasamy. In the present study, it also have been tried to show how the Dalit woman in Kandasamy’s poetry reacts to the traps of caste and patriarchy has been critically analyzed.

Chapter IV: Comparative Analysis

The fourth chapter is comparative in nature wherein the works analyzed earlier have been compared with one another through the certain perspectives. Maya Angelou had maintained her focus on the annihilation of racial slavery, colourism and the patriarchal system of America; whereas Meena Kandasamy has focused on the annihilation of caste, hierarchical system, patriarchy, Dalit
woman’s inequality, her physical and sexual exploitation, etc. in the Indian social order.

**Chapter V: Conclusion**

The fifth chapter has summed up the in some of the conclusions and findings received through the research work. Both the poets, Maya Angelou and Meena Kandasamy have tried to propagate the social revolution against the injustice, exploitation of black woman, i.e. social, economic, psychological, physical and sexual; likewise that of Dalit woman. Both the poets have composed poems with bold and revolutionary language style and diction for abolishing the slavery, racism, colourism, patriarchy, casteism and caste based hierarchical system.

**Bibliography**


Defining both feminism and stylistics is not an easy task because they have various types and critics and analysts have different views about them. Researchers to study texts at various levels to tackle a certain topic. In the selected poems (Still I Rise, Phenomenal Woman and Woman Work), Maya Angelou does not only focus on sexism (or discrimination on the basis of gender), but she tries to display her self-image and to construct her identity through using linguistic devices. Roy F. Baumeister & Debra G. Hutton (1987:71) state Maya Angelou's poem is a clear, strong message to all who think a woman has to be a fashion model to be phenomenal. You don't have to fit other people's ideas of beauty, you just have to be yourself. Andrew has a keen interest in all aspects of poetry and writes extensively on the subject. His poems are published online and in print. Maya Angelou. Maya Angelou and A Summary of Phenomenal Woman. Maya Angelou. Phenomenal Woman is a direct and passionate poem no doubt, you can feel the speaker's need to lay things out just as they are, yet it also contains the seed of self-knowing, of self-confidence. 'A wise woman wishes to be no one's enemy; a wise woman refuses to be anyone's victim.' In Phenomenal Woman, Angelou celebrates her body and the uniqueness that separates her from other women. Angelou, who died at the age of 86 in 2014, is one of the most celebrated poets and memoirists in American literature. Her constant use of the word 'phenomenal' is twofold. One most often defines the word as meaning extraordinary and impressive, and Angelou is certainly reveling in being an extraordinary and impressive woman; however, the word phenomenal is also synonymous with unbelievable. By consciously choosing to call herself phenomenal, Angelou seems almost incredulous that she is lucky enough to be a woman. Select Poetry of Maya Angelou and Meena Kandasamy. Synopsis submitted to Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University. The select primary data of the authors have been taken up for the study; it is analyzed through the descriptive and comparative modes. The proposed work does not require any practical or field work. The secondary texts, journals, magazines and web based material have been consulted.