

## **Voices From the Margins: Feminism, Caste and Resistance in Meena Kandasamy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Selected Works**

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### **Abstract:**

Literature has long served as a site of resistance for marginalised voices. Both African and Dalit women writers have employed literature to articulate the lived realities of oppression shaped by Race, Caste, Class, and Gender. This writing undertakes a comparative study of Meena Kandasamy, an Indian Dalit feminist writer, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian novelist, examining how their works function as feminist interventions against systematic violence. *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Adichie, alongside Meena Kandasamy's *Gypsy Goddess* and *When I Hit You*, this study highlights how both the authors from different countries interrogate patriarchy, social hierarchies, and structures of silencing, using intersectionality, postcolonial feminist and Dalit feminist frameworks, the present article argues that while Meena Kandasamy's writing exposes the intersection of caste and gender oppression in India, Adichie foregrounds the entanglements of race and gender in postcolonial Nigeria. Despite their distinct socio-historical contexts, both writers transformed literature into a strong weapon, reclaiming silenced narratives and envisioning a feminist ethics of resistance.

**Keywords:** **Feminism, Caste, Race, Gender, Intersectionality, Dalit Literature, Comparative.**

**Introduction:**

African literature encompasses the written works of authors of African descent, including those from the African diaspora, particularly in the United States. It spans a wide range of genres and themes. Studying the evolution of African literature is essential for understanding the rich cultural heritage of African writers, as well as their journey from the trauma of slavery to the assertion of modern identity. Throughout history, African writers have used their literary voices to resist oppression, celebrate their heritage, and affirm their identity.

Dalit writers in India have chronicled the pain, oppression, and systemic injustice they have endured. Dalits have long been subjected to inequality, exploitation, and social exclusion by the upper castes. (Sabharwal et al.) They, too, are in search of identity and equality within a deeply stratified society. Dalit literature explores the lived experiences, struggles, and resistance of the Dalit community.

African Literature refers to literary works produced by authors of African origin, both on the continent and in the diaspora. Within this larger body of African Literature, African American Literature—also known as Afro-American Literature—specifically denotes the works of African-descended writers in the United States. These terms are used interchangeably and refer to the same body of work. African American literature reflects the African American experience, chronicling their history, struggles, and resistance against slavery, racism, and social injustice.

Dalit Literature, on the other hand, refers to writings by or about the Dalit community in India. Though the term “Dalit” is not new, it gained prominence through Dr B. R. Ambedkar in the 1930s, who used it in Hindi and Marathi to describe the oppressed sections of Indian society. The word “Dalit” is not a caste label but an assertion of identity—an emblem of resistance and revolution. Dalit literature represents this cultural and political awakening, with Dalit liberation and the fight against caste-based injustice as central themes.

**Objectives:**

1. The prominent objective is to study and identify the Race, Gender, and Caste issue as portrayed in the works of Afro-American writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Dalit women writer, activist Meena Kandasamy.
2. To explore the possibilities arising in Meena Kandasamy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works. To locate the issue of Race and Caste. Gender is facilitated by agents of exploration like poetry, social discrimination, humiliation, subaltern position, subjugation, and vulnerability.
3. To focus on the impact of Caste discrimination, Racial Segregation, Social structure, and gender, which have affected the social health of people and society.
4. To analyse various effects of the suppression of Dalits. The sufferings of Black People, downtrodden, destitutes, underdogs, and women who have been victims of biased social attitudes and structures.

**Feminism:**

In a society dominated by men, literature has traditionally reflected a male perspective. Many writers wrote from their own experiences as men, often failing to understand or represent the struggles and realities of women. As a result, women's voices and experiences were largely excluded from mainstream literature. However, during the modern era, especially from the 1920s onward, women began to speak out against injustice and inequality. This gave rise to various forms of feminism, with women demanding equal rights, justice, and freedom in society.

Virginia Woolf, in her seminal work *A Room of One's Own* (1929), explored the need for women's financial independence and intellectual freedom. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) examined the construction of female identity in a male-dominated society. Later feminist thinkers, such as Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*, 1970), Shulamith Firestone (*The*

Dialectic of Sex, 1970), and Laura Mulvey (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 1975), challenged patriarchal norms in literature, culture, and society.

These works became landmarks in feminist thought, shaping both literary criticism and social discourse. Feminism has since expanded to include a wide range of perspectives, including intersectionality, queer theory, and postcolonial feminism, enriching the literary and academic fields.

After the four major waves of feminism, many new movements and schools of thought emerged within contemporary feminist discourse. These include Black Feminism, Radical Feminism, Digital Feminism, and others. Each of these movements has inspired writers and thinkers across the world to challenge patriarchal systems and reimagine gender roles in society. In India, one such significant development has been the rise of Dalit Feminism, a branch of protest literature that addresses the specific challenges faced by Dalit women. These women face triple marginalisation based on gender, caste, and class—and often struggle for equal rights, freedom, and recognition in a society dominated by both upper-caste men and patriarchal norms.

Dalit feminist writers do not rely on secondhand narratives. Instead, they write from personal experience, documenting their struggles through poetry, autobiography, and fiction. Their works reflect real suffering, social exclusion, and the fight for dignity. Writers such as Urmila Pawar, Baby Tai Kamble, Bama, P. Sivakami, and Meena Kandasamy have made powerful contributions to Dalit literature, articulating the voices of women who were long silenced.

Similarly, in Africa and the African diaspora, Black Feminism has developed in various forms. Contemporary African and African American women writers have used literature as a tool for empowerment and resistance. Authors such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Buchi Emecheta, Audre Lorde, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have written works that deeply resonate with

readers, especially women of African descent. Their writings challenge both racial and gender-based oppression and have left a lasting impact on global feminist thought.

These feminist voices from both Dalit and Black communities have transformed literature by bringing the experiences of the most oppressed to the centre. Their stories serve not only as a protest but also as a call for change and equality. This study examines Black Feminism and Dalit Feminism, focusing on their shared struggles against systemic oppression while also acknowledging their distinct social and political contexts. Black Feminism, grounded in the lived experiences of African American women, addresses the interconnected nature of race, gender, and class oppression. In contrast, Dalit Feminism emerges from the lives of Dalit women in India, who face oppression based on caste, gender, and economic exploitation.

Through a comparative lens, this research highlights how both African American and Dalit women have used literature, grassroots activism, and cultural expression to make their voices heard. Despite their different histories, these movements share a commitment to resisting systems that marginalise women based on intersecting identities. The writings of Dalit women, shaped by experiences of caste-based violence and patriarchal control, are placed alongside the works of Black women, who confront the overlapping pressures of racism and sexism. Together, they provide a deeper understanding of global systems of inequality.

This comparative analysis also reveals the difficulties these movements face in fostering solidarity, both within their communities and across broader intersectional frameworks. Yet, the similarities between their struggles create opportunities for transnational feminist alliances. By placing Dalit Feminism in a global context, this study contributes to the development of inclusive feminist theories. It emphasises the need for frameworks that recognise multiple forms of oppression and promote intersectional justice on a global scale.

**Caste, Gender, and Resistance in Meena Kandasamy's works:**

Meena Kandasamy, a writer, is known for experimental novels that take inspiration from her own life and the real incidents of the Kilvenmani Massacre to depict the struggle, plight, and injustice faced by women and a group of Dalit agricultural labourers. The novels of Meena Kandasamy have a radical postmodern structure that tries to confront the dynamics of caste and gender in Indian society.

Meena Kandasamy's debut novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*, occupies a unique position in the stream of Dalit literature. The novel is extremely distinctive, one of the most rebellious works of Meena Kandasamy, which tries something new in this work; it is not a fairy tale like other contemporary novels. It is a real incident that took place in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, where 44 Dalit agricultural labourers were burnt alive at the hands of upper caste landlords, including women and children. It is not just an ordinary piece of work by Meena Kandasamy; it is a heart-wrenching tale that shows how Dalits are actual sufferers in the chaotic society.

The nonconformist writer of the 21st century, Meena Kandasamy, in her work, *When I Hit You* or *The Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, portrayed the issue of marital rape. Her husband young professor at the University, but an abusive life mate for his wife. After their marriage, the first few days, everything was going smoothly. After a few days, everything starts changing. Her husband started controlling her activity. He imposed a shackle. It becomes difficult for the narrator to come out of that cage. Later on, she was rescued from that prison using her consciousness.

Marital torture or rape, this thing has been happening for many years in modern days, as we call it domestic violence. How women suffer a lot through this domestic violence is indescribable; it impacts women physically, emotionally, and mentally. So many weak-hearted women even commit suicide because of the unbearable trauma that squeezes them. We read

this type of trauma in cultural studies. It explores the impact of the troublesome experience of trauma on individuals and societies. These types of violence and trauma affect their identity and memory.

Both works by Meena Kandasamy portrayed the poor labourers, and a woman tried to rescue them from the situation. It shows how the writer is extremely skilled while using literary creativity in her novels. As well as the Dalit Consciousness, it becomes most important in her writing. With the conscious mind, poor labourers protested for equal wages for their hard work. And so, with the narrator's consciousness made, she came out from her abusive relationship, which led her to produce a literary work that she had scribbled in her spare time.

### **Race, Gender, and Resistance in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie employs the theme of race to illuminate colonial legacies and global inequalities. She utilises gender to examine patriarchal violence, as well as women's resilience and resistance, framing these as both personal and collective struggles for dignity, survival, and identity. Both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* emphasise resistance within the family, gender-based violence, and the enduring effects of colonial oppression.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depicts Eugene Achike as a tyrannical and hypocritical patriarch who exerts authoritarian control over his family, exemplifying patriarchal structures present in some African households. The character Beatrice illustrates the oppression experienced by wives under such systems. Both Beatrice and her children, Kambili and Jaja, are frequent victims of domestic violence. The novel also highlights Beatrice's acts of resistance against her husband's domination.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie explores power and privilege through characters like Ugwu, a house boy who gradually recognises the racial inequality shaped by colonial history. Initially unaware of racial dynamics, Ugwu learns about British-imposed hierarchies through

Odengbo's anti-colonial lectures and interactions with white characters such as Richard. The war further reveals how the suffering of the Igbo people is perceived differently by the Western community. Ugwu's experiences illustrate both the internalisation and eventual questioning of these racial structures.

Both the novels by Adichie portray women as central to survival and transformation, but while *Purple Hibiscus* emphasises breaking the silence, *Half of a Yellow Sun* emphasises rebuilding amid destruction.

### **A Comparative Study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Meena Kandasamy**

African literature and Dalit literature share many similarities. Both are widely studied today and serve as powerful voices for marginalised communities. They challenge dominant systems and speak for equality and justice. Themes like oppression, resistance, and the struggle for identity are central to both. Yet, people from these communities are still waiting and hoping for the basic rights that others enjoy freely.

In postcolonial societies, Dalits in India and Black people in Africa have faced social, mental, and physical oppression. These groups continue to resist caste-based discrimination and racial injustice. Their literature gives space for their voices, allowing them to speak out, demand justice, and seek freedom. Both forms of literature highlight how identity is shaped under oppression and how communities reclaim or assert that identity.

While Dalit literature focuses on the identity and struggles of Dalits in India, African literature explores how Africans reclaim identity after colonialism. In both, literature becomes a tool for social change. It spreads awareness, questions power structures, and encourages people to fight for a fairer world. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* share many themes, especially the subaltern status of

their female characters. Both authors portray how women become victims of domestic violence, oppressive traditions, and patriarchal societies.

In this article, Meena Kandasamy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's comparison on the grounds of feminism, caste, and resistance. One of the most critically acclaimed work *Gypsy Goddess*, which portrays the haunting events that happened in real life. It is not a romantic saga; it shows the painful sufferings of Dalits, including women and children. After this incident, the people from the lower caste raised their voice, but it still remained unheard. In the same way, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* shows the sufferings of Black people. How Meena Kandasamy captures the problems of Dalits using a realistic style. Ngozi subjugates an unpleasant, realistic image of the black people.

Both novels also engage deeply with history and memory. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie revisits a neglected part of Nigerian history—the Biafran War. Her work acts as an archive, giving voice to those—especially women and the poor—who are often left out of official records. Similarly, *The Gypsy Goddess* serves as a counter-history. Kandasamy brings attention to the Kilvenmani massacre, a brutal event often ignored in Indian history.

In Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* both deal with the agony of women in different contexts. *When I Hit You* presents a fierce personal experience of women trapped in abusive marriage, exposing patriarchy, gender violence, and the silencing of women in society. The narrative is direct, semi-autobiographical, and openly resistant, showing the protagonist's struggle to reclaim her voice and freedom. In contrast, *Purple Hibiscus* portrays domestic violence within a Nigerian family dominated by a rigid, religiously authoritarian father. The novel traces the psychological growth of Kambili, a young girl who has slowly become aware of oppression and gradually moves towards emotional independence. While Meena Kandasamy's work emphasises open rebellion and

survival, Adichie's novel focuses on quiet resistance and gradual awakening. Both texts ultimately highlight how family spaces can become sites of violence and how women and girls seek freedom, selfhood, and voice despite oppressive structures.

### **Conclusion**

African literature and Dalit literature share many similarities. Both are widely studied today and serve as powerful voices for marginalised communities. They challenge dominant systems and speak for equality and justice. Dalits in India and Black people in Africa have faced social, mental, and physical oppression. These groups continue to resist caste-based discrimination and racial injustice. While Dalit literature focuses on the identity and struggles of Dalits in India, African literature explores how Africans reclaim identity after colonialism. In both, literature becomes a tool for social change.

Dalits in India and Black people in Africa have long faced exploitation and exclusion based on caste and race. The existing social structures have historically marginalised these communities, reinforcing socio-economic, political, and cultural inequalities. Dalit authors in India have used literature to promote self-respect, raise awareness against caste-based discrimination, and advocate for the upliftment of Dalit communities. Similarly, African writers have challenged racial segregation and worked to build an inclusive society by highlighting the realities of Black experiences through literature.

Meena Kandasamy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works examine the extent of women's struggles to overcome marginalisation and patriarchal domination. Meena Kandasamy's novels tackle the issue of upper caste violence, women's oppression, and caste hierarchies, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels deal with the issue of racism, the impact of colonial oppressions, and male domination. Both writers have experienced different scenarios in different societies. But the two strongest voices from postcolonial nations express the equal pains of people.

Ultimately, this comparative study shows that caste and race, while rooted in different contexts, serve similar functions in sustaining inequality. Gender intersects with these systems, making the struggle more complex for women. Both Kandasamy and Adichie advocate for the empowerment of marginalised voices and challenge the structures that silence them. Dalit and African literature reflect a commitment to justice, equality, and humanity. They confront violence, injustice, and discrimination, especially as they affect women. These literatures inspire a collective rethinking of social roles, power, and identity. Their contribution helps build a future where no individual is denied dignity, and every voice can be heard.

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