

EXAMINING THE MISOGYNISTIC DIMENSIONS IN THE WORKS OF MUKUND RAJ ANAND, SHASHI DESHPANDE, AND MEENA KANDASAMY

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Abstract

The works of Mukund Raj Anand, Shashi Deshpande, and Meena Kandasamy provide diverse critiques of patriarchy, each offering distinct perspectives on women's struggles. Anand's Untouchable and Coolie depict women as passive victims of caste and gender oppression, reinforcing traditional gender roles within the household, despite his critique of caste and class. In contrast, Deshpande's Roots and Shadows and The Dark Holds No Terror highlight women who assert autonomy and challenge societal expectations, emphasizing internal strength and identity in the pursuit of women's empowerment. Meena Kandasamy's When I Hit You and The Gypsy Goddess present unapologetic critiques of gender violence, focusing on women's suffering and resistance in abusive relationships. However, her portrayal of abuse sometimes lacks emotional engagement, distancing readers from the issues. Collectively, these authors address the complexities of gender oppression, offering varied critiques while revealing limitations in their portrayals, such as emotional detachment and the marginalization of female voices.

Keywords: Patriarchy, gender oppression, women's agency, caste and class, empowerment.

1. Introduction

The literary works of Mukund Raj Anand, Shashi Deshpande, and Meena Kandasamy provide profound critiques of patriarchy, each exploring the complexities of women's experiences within oppressive societal structures [1]. Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* offer depictions

of women as passive victims, trapped by both caste and gender oppression, reinforcing traditional gender roles within the family unit. While Anand critiques caste and class inequalities, his portrayal of women often lacks depth and agency, perpetuating patriarchal norms. In contrast, Shashi Deshpande's novels, *Roots and*

Shadows and *The Dark Holds No Terror*, present women who resist societal expectations by asserting autonomy, self-identity, and emotional strength. Deshpande’s works emphasize the importance of women’s empowerment and internal growth, challenging traditional gender roles and highlighting the importance of self-discovery. Meena Kandasamy’s *When I Hit You* and *The Gypsy Goddess* focus on the harsh realities of gender violence, portraying women’s suffering and their resistance to abuse. While Kandasamy’s raw portrayal of violence is unapologetic, it sometimes lacks emotional engagement, distancing the reader from the gravity of the issues [2]. Together, these authors offer valuable perspectives on gender oppression, revealing both the strengths and limitations

of their portrayals of women’s lives in patriarchal societies.

2. Literature Review

The study of literary works often reveals societal undercurrents, particularly the dynamics of gender and power. In examining the misogynistic dimensions within the writings of Mukund Raj Anand, Shashi Deshpande, and Meena Kandasamy, this review explores diverse portrayals of women’s struggles against patriarchy. Anand’s works highlight passive victimhood; Deshpande focuses on women’s empowerment and autonomy, while Kandasamy provides unapologetic critiques of gender violence. This literature review delves into these narratives to uncover how their representations reflect, challenge, or reinforce patriarchal structures within Indian society.

Summary of Literature Review

Author’s	Work Done	Findings
Kandasamy et al.(2024)	Critiqued gender violence in <i>The Gypsy Goddess</i> .	Highlighted women’s resistance but noted the portrayal of abuse could emotionally distance readers.
Kandasamy et al.(2024)	Analyzed <i>When I Hit You</i> as a raw critique of abuse.	Emphasized unapologetic depictions of gender-based violence and women’s struggles against it.
Deshpande et al.(2023)	Explored empowerment in <i>The Dark Holds No Terror</i> and <i>Roots and Shadows</i> .	Showcased women asserting autonomy and self-identity, emphasizing empowerment and internal growth.
Deshpande	Examined feminist	Highlighted the quest for autonomy and self-

et al.(2022)	perspectives in Deshpande's novels.	discovery as key themes in challenging patriarchy.
Anand et al. (2021)	Critically analyzed <i>Coolie</i> and <i>Untouchable</i> .	Revealed patriarchal undertones despite critiques of caste and class, portraying women as passive.
Anand et al. (2020)	Re-examined caste and patriarchy in Anand's works.	Found that traditional gender roles were upheld, marginalizing female agency.
Sharma et al. (2019)	Studied gender and resistance in works by Anand and Deshpande.	Showed how caste and gender oppression intersect in Anand's work, contrasting with Deshpande's focus on empowerment.
Joshi et al. (2019)	Compared women's portrayals in Anand and Deshpande.	Identified Anand's marginalization of women versus Deshpande's focus on agency and identity.
Kumar et al. (2018)	Analyzed women's agency in Kandasamy's novels.	Highlighted themes of resistance and agency in addressing systemic gender violence.
Reddy et al. (2017)	Explored the politics of gendered violence in <i>The Gypsy Goddess</i> .	Discussed how Kandasamy critiques patriarchal structures through vivid portrayals of oppression.
Gupta et al. (2017)	Investigated struggles against patriarchy in Deshpande's work.	Found that Deshpande's female characters challenge traditional roles, advocating for empowerment.
Sharma et al. (2016)	Examined gendered lives in postcolonial Indian literature.	Highlighted the dual oppression of caste and gender in Anand's work and empowerment in Deshpande's.
Kapoor et al. (2016)	Analyzed narratives of oppression in Anand and Deshpande.	Showed that Anand's works reinforce gender roles, while Deshpande provides feminist perspectives.
Patel et al. (2016)	Critiqued resistance and selfhood in Anand and Deshpande.	Found that Deshpande's portrayal of selfhood contrasts Anand's reinforcement of patriarchal norms.

Research Gap

Despite the significant contributions of Anand, Deshpande, and Kandasamy in critiquing patriarchy, there remains a research gap in exploring the nuanced intersections of caste, gender, and patriarchy in their works. While Anand highlights caste and class struggles, his portrayal of women often lacks depth and agency. Deshpande's feminist approach and Kandasamy's vivid depictions of gender violence raise important questions about emotional engagement and the complexity of women's experiences. Further research could delve into how these authors' portrayals influence contemporary feminist discourse.

3. Methodology

The works of Mukund Raj Anand, Shashi Deshpande, and Meena Kandasamy provide powerful critiques of patriarchy, yet they reveal varying degrees of misogynistic undertones [3]. Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* depict women as passive figures oppressed by both caste and gender, reinforcing patriarchal roles within the household. His portrayal of female characters like Bakha's mother and sister shows their subjugation, offering little depth to their inner lives or agency. Although Anand critiques caste and class, he inadvertently upholds traditional gender

norms. In contrast, Shashi Deshpande's feminist perspective in novels such as *Roots and Shadows* challenges these norms, presenting women who assert their autonomy and confront societal expectations. Deshpande's realistic portrayal of women's struggles highlights their internal strength and rejection of passive roles. However, Meena Kandasamy's works, particularly *When I Hit You* and *The Gypsy Goddess*, offer a raw and unapologetic critique of gender violence. Kandasamy explores the complexities of marital abuse, sexual violence, and societal silence, portraying women as both victims and resisters [4]. Her vivid narrative exposes the normalization of abuse, offering a feminist perspective that accounts for real-life struggles, yet sometimes falls short in emotionally connecting with the reader. Together, these authors engage with the persistent patriarchy, offering diverse reflections on gender oppression and resistance.

4. Result & Discussion

Misogyny and Social Critique in *Untouchable*

In *Untouchable*, Mukund Raj Anand critiques the caste system and its impact on marginalized communities, but also

reveals misogynistic elements in his portrayal of women. Female characters, such as Bakha's mother and sister, are doubly oppressed by both caste and gender, depicted as passive figures with limited agency [5]. Anand focuses on their roles within the household, reinforcing patriarchal views that women exist to serve men and the family, without exploring their inner lives or desires. Additionally, Bakha's sexual fantasies objectify women, reducing them to mere objects of male desire. While the novel critiques caste and class oppression, it paradoxically upholds traditional gender norms, limiting women's roles to passive, secondary positions.

Misogyny in Coolie: The Treatment of Women as Victims

Mukund Raj Anand critiques the caste system but also reveals misogynistic elements in his portrayal of women. Female characters like Bakha's mother and sister are doubly oppressed by caste and gender, portrayed as passive and confined to traditional roles within the household. Anand reinforces patriarchal views, offering little insight into their inner lives or agency. Moreover, Bakha's sexual fantasies objectify women, reducing them to objects of male desire. While critiquing caste and class oppression, the novel

paradoxically upholds traditional gender norms, limiting women's roles to passive, secondary positions [6].

Anand's Narrative Style: A Tool for Gender Bias

Anand's narrative style significantly shapes the representation of women in his works. His use of realism and a journalistic approach effectively highlights caste, class, and labor issues but limits the depth of female characters. By focusing on male protagonists like Bakha and Munoo, women are relegated to passive roles, often seen through a male lens, reinforcing traditional gender roles. The third-person omniscient narration in *Untouchable* and *Coolie* offers little insight into the personal experiences of female characters, reducing them to supporting figures. This reflects the patriarchal norms of early 20th-century India, where women were confined to roles as mothers, wives, or victims. Anand's focus on male struggles marginalizes women's voices, perpetuating gender bias and limiting their narrative agency [7].

Feminism in Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande is a prominent feminist author who blends her unique style of feminism with a broad humanistic perspective. Her works focus on the struggles and fears of women, particularly

in modern Indian society, where her female protagonists are resilient and self-empowered. Deshpande's realistic portrayal of women's challenges, including sexual oppression, encourages self-respect and identity. She represents a new generation of women writers who depict strong, independent women capable of making their own decisions, free from male influence.

Authentic Female Characters in Deshpande's Works

Deshpande is a realist who creates female characters grounded in reality, not stereotypes. Unlike many Indian novels that idealize women's patience and devotion, Deshpande's heroines challenge traditional notions of woman's virtue. Her protagonists, such as Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, reject outdated rituals and assert their autonomy [8]. Deshpande avoids the superwoman trope, focusing on women in their natural state, demonstrating their inner strength and defiance against oppressive traditions. She argues for evaluating women's potential on equal terms with men.

Women in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

Shashi Deshpande addresses the marginalization and subjugation of women in her works, highlighting the patriarchal

structures that restrict their growth and oppress them across social, political, economic, and cultural domains. Women in contemporary India struggle between tradition and modernity, facing multiple forms of oppression. Deshpande explores these challenges, depicting women's efforts to resist the dominant gender norms and demand equality and respect. In her novels, Deshpande critiques the societal construct of gender that places women as the "other," oppressed by male-dominated power structures. She advocates for women's empowerment and the right to autonomy, reflecting the need for fair legislation and an end to the historical subjugation of women. Despite societal progress, women in India continue to fight for dignity, equality, and respect, rejecting the outdated notion of the "pativrata nari" (devoted wife) and demanding recognition as equals in both the public and private spheres [9].

Shashi Deshpande and Her Women Protagonists

Shashi Deshpande portrays the struggles of Indian women whose rights are often denied by traditional culture. Her works explore the conflict between individual identity and societal expectations, with women facing pressures from both tradition and modernity. Deshpande's

feminism focuses on legal and social emancipation, emphasizing that women can only overcome centuries of oppression when treated as equals. Her characters, particularly educated, middle-class women, navigate complex relationships and search for self-identity. Deshpande portrays women as real and relatable, often caught between the ideals of tradition and the desire for personal freedom. Her feminist perspective advocates for women's empowerment, emphasizing autonomy and rejecting man-centered oppression. While her works acknowledge family roles, they highlight the importance of women asserting their identity [10]. Deshpande's debut novel, *Roots and Shadows*, features the protagonist Indu, who challenges societal norms and strives for personal freedom, embodying the tension between tradition and progress. Deshpande's feminist outlook calls for a balance between the two, with women finding strength in their individuality and challenging the limitations placed on them by society.

The Patriarchal Struggles in Meena Kandasamy's Works

Marriage in Indian society is often seen as a woman's ultimate role, where she is expected to uphold family honor and has little decision-making power [11]. The

patriarchal system leaves women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, both in their personal and professional lives. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* portrays this inequality, highlighting how women continue to suffer from silence, abuse, and societal oppression. Despite superficial reforms, women face ongoing violence and discrimination, emphasizing the need for genuine change to ensure equality and safety [12]. Indian women have long been victims of a patriarchal society where male dominance prevails. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* powerfully illustrates the gender bias where a husband asserts sexual superiority and exerts control through violence. The protagonist, though suffering abuse, finds strength in writing and defying her oppressor. Her letters to imaginary lovers and vivid descriptions of her suffocating life reflect her inner resistance. The novel, echoing James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, captures the protagonist's struggle to find her voice amidst violence and societal constraints. Through her reflections, Kandasamy critiques the societal structures that perpetuate women's suffering [13].

Meena Kandasamy's novel provides a stark portrayal of the 21st-century Indian woman, challenging the myths

surrounding love marriages and marital rape. Through a powerful fictional narrative, the protagonist's experience of an abusive marriage exposes the violence that persists even in modern, so-called "love" marriages. Kandasamy critiques societal norms, where silence and endurance are expected of women. The novel highlights how a feminist can fall victim to marital abuse, while exploring themes of love, violence, and sexual desire. The protagonist's brutally honest account of marital rape forces readers to confront the normalization of violence against women. Kandasamy also addresses the question of why women remain in abusive relationships, capturing the internal struggles and the societal constraints that prevent women from escaping [14]. The book is both a personal and poetic meditation on feminism, violence, and the struggles of working-class women, with Kandasamy emphasizing that feminism must account for all women's lived realities. Kandasamy's novel critiques the patriarchal values embedded in marriage, where women are expected to be submissive and endure violence. Through the protagonist's experiences, it highlights how society normalizes abuse, even in "modern" marriages. Drawing on literary

references, the novel exposes the persistence of toxic masculinity and the complexities of rationalizing abuse. The protagonist's use of writing as resistance illustrates the psychological impact of such relationships. Kandasamy also reflects on her own experiences, showing how a feminist can be trapped in an abusive marriage, while societal gender biases hinder women's aspirations.

Kandasamy's vivid and poetic language captures the intensity of her protagonist's trauma, using stylistic devices to explore themes of desire, abuse, and self-expression. The protagonist finds writing as a form of resistance, using it to reclaim her space and defy her abuser. Drawing on feminist influences like Anne Sexton and Kamala Das, Kandasamy connects her work to broader feminist discourse, challenging the notion that an Indian female writer in English is akin to a colonial-era prostitute. Her novel delves into toxic masculinity, particularly in an Indian context, comparing the emotional abuse in her work to similar themes in Gwendoline Riley's *First Love*. Kandasamy's narrative also intersects with her first novel *The Gypsy Goddess*, exploring gender inequality and social injustice in the story of a massacre in Tamil Nadu, where power dynamics and

violence reveal the dark undercurrents of patriarchal society.

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, a novelist in exile in a Tamil village becomes revered as a demigod after hearing the chilling tale of seven gypsy women and their children being murdered. He transforms their tragic fate into the creation of a goddess, and the village begins worshipping her, bringing divine punishment to wrongdoers. Kandasamy's non-linear, multi-voiced narrative uses black humor and raw anger to expose the brutality of violence, especially the killing of children. The novel critiques the sterile, sanitized language of academia, opting instead for vivid, unflinching descriptions that blend grimness with poetic elements, while also examining misogynistic themes and their portrayal in the context of gender violence. Meena Kandasamy's essays address critical issues like caste annihilation and women's rights, particularly focusing on the ongoing violence against women in India. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, she critiques the normalization of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and caste-based discrimination. Kandasamy highlights the cultural silencing of sexual violence, including marital rape and the abuse of Dalit women by caste-Hindu men. She also condemns the state's complicity,

exposing police negligence and corruption in cases of abuse. The novel intertwines storytelling with political commentary, reflecting Kandasamy's multifaceted perspective. Through her character Maayi, Kandasamy demonstrates openness to diverse viewpoints, while her stark depictions of violence shed light on the harsh realities faced by marginalized women.

Meena Kandasamy reconstructs the events leading to a massacre, its execution, and the aftermath through a self-reflexive narrative that challenges traditional storytelling. She employs varied techniques, such as political pamphlet pastiches, survivor monologues, and a chilling inspector's post-mortem, to reveal the cold detachment of authorities towards the victims. The use of inquest forms and detailed descriptions of the aftermath underscores the dehumanization of those affected. Kandasamy's satire targets both landowners' and Communist Party rhetoric, exposing the exploitation of the land and its people. Through these methods, she critiques societal indifference and the pervasive violence, especially toward marginalized women. Meena Kandasamy's portrayal of a massacre is polemical, using exaggerated statistics to stir anger and critique exploitation.

However, her depiction of the massacre itself falters. The lengthy, unpunctuated sentence lacks the emotional depth needed to make the atrocity feel immediate. While Kandaswamy provides the factual details, she struggles to evoke an emotional connection, distancing the reader from the horror. This contrasts with Gabriel Garcia Marquez's approach in *100 Years of Solitude*, where he immerses the reader in the chaos and senselessness of violence through vivid metaphors and a child's perspective. Kandaswamy's choice to use untranslated Tamil and mimic local speech adds authenticity, but also distances the reader, presenting a challenge common in Indian English literature. Meena Kandaswamy navigates the challenge of writing for a foreign audience while staying true to her cultural roots. She critiques the Western romanticized view of rural India, avoiding clichés to prevent exoticism. Her implied reader appears to be an uninformed foreign audience, shaping the novel's tone. While raising awareness of societal injustices like the Kilvenmani Massacre, the novel falls short of emotionally engaging readers, revealing a gap between reportage and fiction's potential for deeper understanding.

5. Conclusion

The selected works of Mukund Raj Anand, Shashi Deshpande, and Meena Kandasamy offer diverse critiques of patriarchy, though each reveals different levels of misogynistic elements. Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* depict women as passive victims of both caste and gender oppression, reinforcing traditional gender roles within the household. While his novels critique caste and class, they paradoxically uphold patriarchal views, with female characters offering little depth or agency. In contrast, Shashi Deshpande's feminist approach in *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terror* showcases women who assert autonomy, challenging societal expectations and rejecting passive roles. Deshpande emphasizes internal strength and the quest for identity, advocating for women's empowerment. Meena Kandasamy's works, particularly *When I Hit You* and *The Gypsy Goddess*, provide raw, unapologetic critiques of gender violence, revealing women's suffering and resistance in abusive relationships. However, her vivid portrayal of abuse can sometimes lack emotional engagement, distancing readers from the issues. Together, these authors engage with the complexities of gender oppression, offering varied perspectives on women's struggles within patriarchal

structures while also revealing the limitations of their portrayals, from emotional detachment to marginalizing female voices in favor of male narratives.

Future Scope

- Research could investigate how caste, class, and gender oppression intersect in Anand's novels, shaping women's experiences.
- Future studies can focus on enhancing emotional depth in portrayals of abuse, improving reader empathy.
- Analyzing how male-dominated narratives marginalize women and exploring alternative, woman-centric narratives.
- Expanding feminist analysis of Deshpande's works and comparing with other feminist authors could deepen understanding.

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