

Study Material  
March 2020  
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Assistant Professor

## Indian Writings in English

Meena Kandasamy

MEENA KANDASAMY (b. 1984) has actively sought to combine her love for the written word with the struggle for social justice through poetry, translation, fiction and essays for the last fifteen years.

Her debut collection of poems, *Touch* (2006) was themed around caste and untouchability, and her second, *Ms Militancy* (2010) was an explosive, feminist retelling/reclaiming of Tamil and Hindu myths. Her critically acclaimed first (anti)novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*, (2014) smudged the line between powerful fiction and fearsome critique in narrating the 1968 massacre of forty-four landless untouchable men, women and children striking for higher wages in the village of Kilvenmani, Tanjore.

Her second novel, a work of auto-fiction, *When I Hit You: Or, The Portrait of the Writer As A Young Wife* (2017) drew upon her own experience within an abusive marriage, to lift the veil on the silence that surrounds domestic violence and marital rape in modern India. It was selected as book of the year by *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Financial Times*; and was shortlisted for the *Women's Prize for Fiction* 2018 among others.

Her third novel, *Exquisite Cadavers*, a work of experimental fiction was published in November 2019.

She received a PEN Translates award for her translation of Salma's *Manamiyangal* (Women, Dreaming; forthcoming Titled Axis Press, Penguin-Randomhouse India, 2020). At present she is exploring her non-fiction writing through a Arts Council, *Developing Your Creative*

*Practice* (DYCP) grant. She holds a PhD in sociolinguistics. Her work has appeared in eighteen languages. She lives in East London.

**Reference-**<https://www.kandasamy.co.uk/about>

Please read the Poem and in the next class we will discuss the analysis.

## **TOUCH**

Have you ever tried meditation?  
Struggling hard to concentrate,  
and keeping your mind as blank  
as a whitewashed wall by closing  
your eyes, nose, ears; and shutting out  
every possible thought. Every thing.  
And, the only failure, that ever came,  
the only gross betrayal—  
was from your own skin.  
You will have known this.

Do you still remember,  
how, the first distractions arose?  
And you blamed skin as a sinner;  
how, when your kundalini was rising,  
shaken, you felt the cold concrete floor  
skin rubbing against skin, your saffron robes,  
how, even in a far-off different realm—  
your skin anchored you to this earth.  
Amidst all that pervading emptiness,  
touch retained its sensuality.  
You will have known this.

Or if you thought more variedly, about

taste, you would discount it—as the touch of the tongue. Or, you may recollect how a gentle touch, a caress changed your life multifold, and you were never the person you should have been. Feeling with your skin, was perhaps the first of the senses, its reality always remained with you— You never got rid of it. You will have known this.

You will have known almost every knowledgeable thing about the charms and the temptations that touch could hold.

But, you will never have known that touch – the taboo to your transcendence, when crystallized in caste was a paraphernalia of undeserving hate.

(First published in Kavya Bharati)

[Meena Kandasamy](#)