

**Rewriting of Nalayani Myth in Meena Kandaswamy's Poem "Six Hours of Chastity"****Dr. Balkrishna Dada Waghmare**

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**Abstract:**

*Most of Meena Kandaswamy's works are centered on feminism and the anti-caste Caste Annihilation movement. Her poems deal with feminine sensibilities that defy male hegemony seen in the Indian society. Her poem, "Six Hours of Chastity" deals with the six hours in the life of Nalayani, the wife of a sage, Maudgalya. Kandaswamy has defied the male hegemony in this poem. Traditional concept is that women are the silent sufferer or sexually meek or submissive. In this poem, Nalayani has sex with six different men, while her husband enjoys the company of a prostitute. Meena Kandaswamy gives her equal status. She isn't submissive like the character in the myth of Nalayani. She makes her rebel or Ms. Militancy by having sex with six different men during her waiting for her husband outside the house of a prostitute. She even laughs at the idea of chastity of Draupadi and eventually saves Nalayani from being Draupadi by having sex with six men.*

**Key Words:**

Nalayni, myth, Indian woman, feminism

Indian woman has been given a high status of a goddess in Indian mythologies. There are goddesses in who represent power, intelligence, purity, and so on. Examples of Kali, Durga and Saraswati can be given in this context. But at the same time social restrictions are imposed on her. She is confined within the four walls by man-made world. There are so many restrictions on her in the name of religion, traditions and customs. The infamous book Manusmriti asserts that "as a girl, she should obey and seek protection of her father, as a young woman her husband, and as a widow her son" (Olivelle 98).

Meena Kandaswamy is an Indian poet, fiction writer, translator and activist. Most of her works deal with feminism and the anti-caste Caste Annihilation movement. Her poems explore feminine sensibilities that defy male hegemony seen Indian society. Ms. Militancy is the collection of her poems that deals with her radical feminism. Her poem, "Six Hours of Chastity" deals with the six hours in the life of Nalayani, the wife of sage, Maudgalya.

The myth of Nalayani or the story of a wife's chastity and uncompromising loyalty to her husband Rishi Maudgalya is well documented in the Mahabharatha. As per this myth, there was a sage, Maudgalya. He was a person of extreme short temper but well versed in all the four Vedas. Nalayani was married with him. Maudgalya decided to test her chastity and devotion. He brought on himself the deadly disease

leprosy by his magical power. Nalayani served him with devotion. She attended to each and every small demand that would keep him happy but he was never satisfied with her services and found fault with her. One day, Maudgalya wanted to enjoy the company of another woman, i.e. a prostitute who would sell her favours only for gold. He commanded his wife to carry him in a basket on her head to the house of the prostitute. Nalayani with great care put him in a big basket and carried him on her head to the house of the prostitute. It also invites the laughter and criticism of the on lookers who witness this thing. After putting him on the bed of the prostitute, she waited outside of the house till the evening. She waited for order of her husband to take him back to their home. Meena Kandaswamy's this poem picks this thread. Here after, her deconstruction or rewriting of the Nalayani myth starts. She writes the happenings during the six hours of her waiting outside of the house of the prostitute. The visitors to the brothels mistake Nalayani, "the devout wife, to be a mistress of guilt, a woman of the night" (Kandaswamy 49). They think she is a prostitute like others in the brothel. On the other hand, Nalayani takes this opportunity to her favour. She also "plays along, pretends to the visiting stranger" (49). She, as a prostitute, accepts the strangers. She spends six hours with six different men. The first one has come there for salvation. To the second person, she acts as a whore. The third visitor is a spice-vendor. Fourth

one is of eighteen years old. The fifth one is a gambler. The last one to visit is a priest who enters there in dark. By last example, Meena Kandaswamy exposes the hypocrisy of the so-called priests who pretend pious and sacred during daytime and doing immoral things by the night.

After six hours of stay there, both husband and wife leave the place. Nalayani carries her husband in the basket. Her husband is now “not bothering to sever out spite or spew her hate” (50). Here, Kandaswamy has defied the male hegemony here. Women are not the silent sufferer or sexually meek or submissive in her poems. While her husband enjoys the company of another woman, Nalayani enjoys “six men, one for every hour of night” (50). Nalayani after these six hours ironical chastity, “she laughs and cries and laughs again” (50). It indicates her rebellion against set standards of the society. The phrase ‘the lightness of her burden’ indicates her burden is equal to nothing and at same time, it has some emotional effect on her psyche. As a result, she cries and laughs.

Meena Kandaswamy’s criticism of male hegemony is not limited to Nalayani character alone. Draupadi is her next birth as per Mahabharata. After winning the heart of her husband and bringing back him to normal state from leprosy, Nalayani and her husband do sex in all forms of men and animals. But Nalayani libido remains unsatisfied. As a result, her husband gives a curse that she will marry five men in her next life. Another thing, she was also given a boon by Lord Shiva that she will marry five husbands in her next life and another thing that she will be virgin even after having sex with five different men. But here in this poem, Meena Kandaswamy laughs at this idea. She ironically says “after the fifth man, every woman becomes a temple” (49). She laughs at this idea chastity and virginity.

Even in Mahabharata, Draupadi was laughed by Kauravas for marrying five men. Dushasan also calls her a whore in public for marrying five men. Meena here saves Nalayani from becoming Draupadi by having sex with six men.

Thus, the poem, “Six Hours of Chastity”, is an attempt to rewrite the myth challenging the set standards of the society. It also exposes hypocrisy of the self-righteous men like priests who often mask themselves in piety in order to maintain their holy position. A priest visiting a whorehouse can be found only in the poems of Meena Kandaswamy. As the title indicates, the character of Nalayani is the Ms. Militancy in this poem who goes against the set standards of the society. It demonstrates the radical feminism of Meena Kandaswamy.

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