

Writing the Body, Resisting the System: Gendered Vulnerability in Arundhati Roy and Meena Kandasamy

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Abstract

This paper examines how Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) deploy the female body as a contested site where systemic violence is inscribed and resisted. Through close reading textual analysis grounded in postcolonial feminism, Dalit feminism, and corporeal feminism, this study shows that both authors write the body not merely as a passive surface of oppression but as an active locus of resistance against intersecting structures of caste, class, gender, and colonial modernity. Roy's narrative foregrounds the transgressive body of Ammu, whose intercaste desire violates the "Love Laws" that regulate bodily contact across caste boundaries, while Kandasamy's polyphonic text inscribes the collective trauma of Dalit agricultural labourers whose bodies become sites of state-sanctioned violence during the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre. Both texts reveal how gendered vulnerability operates through what this paper terms "corporeal subjugation"—the systematic targeting of female bodies to enforce social hierarchies. Yet simultaneously, both authors demonstrate how these same bodies become instruments of defiance, articulating forms of resistance that challenge dominant narratives of victimhood. By comparatively analysing specific textual moments where bodily experience intersects with structural violence, this paper argues that Roy and Kandasamy contribute to a distinctly South Asian feminist literary tradition that refuses the separation of body from politics, instead insisting on embodiment as the primary terrain where power is both exercised and contested.

Keywords: embodiment, gendered violence, Dalit feminism, postcolonial feminism, corporeal resistance, caste, intersectionality

1. Introduction

The female body in postcolonial South Asian literature functions as what Malhotra describes as a site of "unbearable weight," bearing the accumulated inscriptions of colonial history, patriarchal control, caste hierarchy, and neoliberal violence. In contemporary Indian women's writing, the body emerges not as a neutral biological entity but as a politically charged terrain where systemic oppression materializes and where resistance takes shape. This paper examines two landmark novels—Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014)—to explore how these authors deploy embodiment as both a narrative strategy and a political intervention. Both texts centre female bodies that are marked by intersecting vulnerabilities: caste, class, gender, and in Roy's case, the transgression of social boundaries; in Kandasamy's, the collective annihilation of Dalit bodies through state-sanctioned massacre.

The central thesis of this paper is that Roy and Kandasamy write the body as a dialectical site—simultaneously vulnerable to systemic violence and capable of articulating resistance. This dual function challenges conventional representations of victimhood in South Asian literature, where marginalized bodies are often depicted as purely passive recipients of oppression. Instead, both authors demonstrate what Banerjee et al. (2004) term the "engendering of violence," showing how violence is not merely enacted upon bodies but is constitutive of gendered and caste subjectivities. As Almeida (2002) argues in her analysis of Roy's work, the novel "transgresses several social and historical rules in terms of both gender and race issues in the context of the postcolonial and caste based society," positioning the body itself as a site of transgression rather than mere victimization. Similarly, Arnott (2001) emphasizes the importance of reading "the sexed specificity of the female body" to mark the limits of existing discourses of resistance, a framework particularly relevant to understanding how both Roy and Kandasamy construct their narratives around corporeal experience.

This study contributes to scholarship on South Asian feminist literature by offering a sustained comparative analysis of how two authors from different generational, linguistic, and caste positions engage with embodiment as a political and aesthetic strategy. While Roy writes from a position of relative privilege as a Syrian Christian woman, her narrative centres the Dalit body of Velutha and the transgressive desire of Ammu, whose intercaste relationship violates the fundamental "Love Laws" that structure Indian society. Kandasamy, writing as a Dalit feminist activist, offers a more explicitly political engagement with caste violence, centring the collective trauma of Dalit agricultural

labourers in *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014). Despite these differences, both authors share a commitment to what this paper terms “corporeal resistance”—the use of bodily experience, bodily vulnerability, and bodily defiance as modes of challenging systemic oppression.

The significance of this comparative approach lies in its ability to illuminate both continuities and ruptures in South Asian feminist literary practice. By examining how Roy and Kandasamy deploy similar narrative strategies—fragmented temporality, polyphonic narration, visceral bodily description—to different political ends, this paper demonstrates the heterogeneity of feminist resistance in contemporary Indian writing. Moreover, by grounding this analysis in close reading of specific textual moments, this study avoids the tendency toward abstract theorization that sometimes characterizes scholarship on embodiment, instead demonstrating how literary form itself becomes a vehicle for political critique.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on embodiment in postcolonial literature and the increasing attention to Dalit feminist writing, previous studies have largely treated these texts in isolation or have focused primarily on either the representation of violence or the articulation of resistance, without adequately theorizing their dialectical relationship. Furthermore, existing scholarship has not sufficiently examined how the specific narrative strategies employed by Roy and Kandasamy—Roy’s fragmented temporality and focalization through children’s perspectives, and Kandasamy’s polyphonic and stratigraphic narrative structure—function as formal mechanisms that enable the representation of corporeal subjugation while simultaneously enacting textual resistance. This paper addresses these gaps by offering a comparative analysis that foregrounds the body as the primary site where oppression and agency are not sequential but simultaneous, and by demonstrating how narrative form itself becomes a mode of resistance. The structure of this paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant scholarship on feminist body politics, postcolonial feminism, Dalit feminism, and Indian women’s writing, establishing the theoretical framework for the analysis. Section 3 outlines the methodology of close reading and comparative textual analysis employed in this study. Section 4 presents the core analysis, examining how both texts inscribe vulnerability, represent transgressive desire, depict collective trauma, and articulate resistance through embodiment, culminating in a detailed comparative analysis. Section 5 concludes by reflecting on the implications of this study for understanding contemporary South Asian feminist literature and the politics of embodiment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Feminist Theory and Body Politics

Feminist scholarship on the body has long recognized embodiment as a central site of political struggle. Second-wave feminism, particularly through the work of theorists like Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and later Judith Butler (1990), established that the body is not a pre-discursive biological given but is constituted through social, cultural, and political processes. Fahs (2015) traces the “impact and legacy of second wave corporeal embodiment,” demonstrating how feminist activists and theorists reclaimed the body as a site of resistance against patriarchal control. This reclamation involved challenging medical authority over women’s bodies, asserting reproductive autonomy, and refusing the objectification of female bodies in visual culture.

Contemporary feminist theory has expanded this framework to consider how bodies are marked by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. The concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and elaborated by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (2022), insists that gender cannot be understood in isolation from race, class, sexuality, and other axes of identity and power. This intersectional approach is particularly crucial for analysing South Asian women’s writing, where caste operates as a fundamental structuring principle alongside gender. As Sharma (2024) argues in her analysis of Roy’s work, “intersectionality” provides a framework for understanding how “defiant faces” emerge at the nexus of multiple oppressions.

The body in feminist theory is thus understood as both a material reality and a discursive construction. Butler’s concept of performativity suggests that gender is not an essence but is produced through repeated bodily acts and gestures. Yet as critics of purely constructivist approaches have noted, this emphasis on discourse risks eliding the material reality of bodily pain, vulnerability, and violence. Feminist phenomenologists like Iris Marion Young (1980) and Sara Ahmed (2006) have sought to balance attention to discourse with recognition of lived bodily experience, arguing that bodies are shaped by their orientation toward and movement through social space. This tension between materiality and discourse is particularly salient in postcolonial contexts, where the body bears the literal marks of colonial and caste violence.

2.2 Postcolonial Feminism and the Subaltern Body

Postcolonial feminist theory has been centrally concerned with the question of how to represent subaltern women’s experiences without reproducing colonial or patriarchal violence. Gayatri Spivak’s foundational essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) argued that subaltern women occupy a position of double marginalization, silenced both by colonial discourse and by patriarchal structures within their own communities. Spivak’s later work on Mahasweta Devi’s fiction (1989) demonstrates how literary texts can gesture toward subaltern experience without claiming to transparently represent it. As Arnott (2001) elaborates, Spivak’s readings of Devi’s stories “enable a powerful understanding of the construction of that materiality” of women’s suffering bodies, using “the sexed specificity of the female body to mark the limits of existing discourses of analysis and of resistance.”

The subaltern body in postcolonial literature is often depicted as bearing the inscriptions of colonial history. Frantz Fanon’s (1952) analysis of colonialism’s psychic and corporeal effects demonstrated how colonial power operates through the racialization and dehumanization of colonized bodies. Postcolonial feminist scholars have extended this analysis to consider how gender and sexuality intersect with colonial violence. The figure of the violated woman has been particularly fraught in postcolonial discourse, often serving as a metaphor for the

violated nation. Feminist critics have challenged this metaphorical use of women's bodies, insisting on the specificity of gendered violence and refusing the subsumption of women's experiences into nationalist narratives.

Rajan (2000) argues that postcolonial feminism must navigate between the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism and the cultural relativism that can excuse gender-based violence in the name of tradition. She advocates for a "politics of resistance" that is attentive to local contexts while maintaining a commitment to women's autonomy and bodily integrity. This approach is evident in contemporary Indian women's writing, which often depicts the body as a site where global and local, modern and traditional, colonial and postcolonial forces converge and conflict.

2.3 Dalit Feminism and Intersectional Oppression

Dalit feminism emerged as a distinct strand of feminist thought in India in response to the failure of both mainstream feminism and Dalit movements to adequately address the specific experiences of Dalit women. As Mukherjee (2022) notes in her review of *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Dalit feminism insists on the inseparability of caste and gender oppression, arguing that Dalit women face a unique form of violence that cannot be understood through either a purely feminist or purely anti-caste lens. This intersectional approach recognizes that Dalit women's bodies are targeted precisely because of their location at the intersection of caste and gender hierarchies.

Mangat and Gill (2024) examine how Dalit women "negotiate between speech and silence as a form of agency" in the context of sexual violence, demonstrating that resistance takes multiple forms, not all of which conform to liberal feminist models of empowerment. Their work challenges the binary between victimhood and agency, showing how Dalit women navigate structural constraints while asserting their subjectivity. This nuanced understanding of agency is crucial for reading texts like Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, which refuses to depict Dalit women as either pure victims or heroic resisters, instead presenting a complex portrait of survival and struggle.

Cherechés (2024) provides a crucial intervention in trauma studies by examining "the rhetoric of Dalit psychological suffering" in Kandasamy's novel. She argues that mainstream trauma theory, with its focus on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), "risks rendering the specificity of long-term pain suffered by oppressed groups, such as Dalits, invisible and unknowable." Instead, Cherechés advocates for understanding trauma as "a spectrum of conditions" that includes "insidious trauma," generational transmission of trauma, and "pre-traumatic stress" reactions. This framework is essential for understanding how caste-based violence operates not as isolated incidents but as an ongoing structural condition that shapes Dalit subjectivity across generations.

The concept of "corporeal subjugation" is particularly relevant to Dalit feminist analysis. Dalit bodies have historically been marked as polluting and untouchable, subject to spatial segregation and violent enforcement of caste boundaries. Sexual violence against Dalit women has been used as a tool of caste domination, with upper-caste men asserting their power through the violation of Dalit women's bodies. As Tejaa argues in her analysis of *The Gypsy Goddess*, caste and gender intersect in ways that make Dalit women's bodies particularly vulnerable to violence while simultaneously positioning them as agents of resistance against caste hierarchy.

2.4 Indian Women's Writing and Corporeal Resistance

Contemporary Indian women's writing in English has been characterized by a sustained engagement with the body as a site of political struggle. From Kamala Das's confessional poetry to Mahasweta Devi's stories of tribal women's resistance, Indian women writers have refused the separation of the personal and the political, insisting that bodily experience is always already political. This tradition of corporeal resistance takes multiple forms: the assertion of female desire against patriarchal control, the documentation of violence against women's bodies, the reclamation of maternal bodies from nationalist discourse, and the representation of bodies marked by caste, class, and religious difference.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* has been widely analyzed for its treatment of transgressive desire and caste violence. Khalili and Pirajmuddin (2022) examine the novel's "political reterritorialization of sexuality," arguing that Ammu's intercaste relationship with Velutha represents a fundamental challenge to the social order. Hack (2022) offers a sophisticated reading of "trauma and the language of matter" in the novel, demonstrating how Roy's prose style itself enacts the fragmentation and materiality of traumatic experience. These readings emphasize the novel's formal innovations—its non-linear temporality, its attention to sensory detail, its use of repetition and fragmentation—as integral to its political project.

Kandasamy's work has been analyzed as part of a broader tradition of Dalit writing that centres caste violence and resistance. Yadav (2017) examines "the politics of remembering" in *The Gypsy Goddess*, arguing that the novel intervenes in official histories that have erased or minimized the Kilvenmani massacre. Herrero (2019) analyzes the novel's "postmodernism and politics," demonstrating how Kandasamy's experimental narrative techniques serve political ends rather than representing a retreat into aesthetic play. Montheil (2023) explores the relationship between "horror, empathy and justice" in the novel, arguing that Kandasamy's visceral depictions of violence are designed to provoke ethical and political response rather than voyeuristic consumption.

Menozzi (2020) provides a particularly insightful reading of Kandasamy's narrative strategy, arguing that the novelist functions as "a digger excavating overlapping grounds of history and reassembling them in a metafictional, multidimensional narrative composition." This "non synchronous aesthetic" replaces chronological order with a "stratigraphic process" that mirrors "objective conditions of peripheral capitalism in the narrative dialectic of story and history." This reading emphasizes how Kandasamy's formal choices are inseparable from her political commitments, demonstrating that aesthetic experimentation can serve rather than undermine political critique. Panda (2018) examines "memory, empathy, and narrative" in *The Gypsy Goddess*, arguing that the novel's polyphonic structure creates space for multiple

perspectives on the massacre, refusing a single authoritative account. This narrative strategy aligns with Dalit feminist commitments to centring marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives. The novel's refusal of linear narrative and its incorporation of multiple genres—poetry, historical document, fictional narrative—enact a formal resistance to the violence of official history.

2.5 Conceptualizing Corporeal Subjugation

This paper introduces and employs the concept of “corporeal subjugation” to describe the systematic and intersectional targeting of female bodies—particularly those marked by caste, class, and other marginalized identities—as a mechanism for enforcing and reproducing social hierarchies. Corporeal subjugation operates through multiple registers: physical violence (rape, beating, murder), spatial control (confinement, exclusion from public spaces, regulation of movement), symbolic violence (the marking of bodies as “untouchable,” “impure,” or “transgressive”), and economic exploitation (the extraction of labour from bodies deemed disposable). Unlike terms such as “bodily oppression” or “gendered violence,” which may suggest discrete acts or episodic harm, corporeal subjugation emphasizes the systematic and structural nature of this violence—it is not incidental but constitutive of the social order itself.

Corporeal subjugation is inherently intersectional. In the South Asian context, it cannot be understood through gender alone but must account for how caste, class, religion, and colonial/postcolonial power relations converge on the body. For Dalit women, corporeal subjugation takes specific forms rooted in caste ideology: their bodies are constructed as both “untouchable” (to be avoided in everyday social interaction) and simultaneously “touchable” (available for sexual violence by upper-caste men). This paradox—of simultaneous exclusion and violation—is central to understanding the unique vulnerability of Dalit women's bodies, as depicted in Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*.

In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, corporeal subjugation operates through the enforcement of “Love Laws”—the unwritten codes that regulate bodily contact, desire, and intimacy across caste lines. Ammu's body becomes a site of subjugation not only because she is a woman in a patriarchal society but because her intercaste desire with Velutha, a Dalit man, violates the foundational logic of caste purity. Her punishment—social ostracism, physical confinement, and ultimately premature death—exemplifies how corporeal subjugation functions to discipline bodies that transgress caste boundaries.

Crucially, however, corporeal subjugation is never total. Both Roy and Kandasamy demonstrate that the same bodies targeted for subjugation retain the capacity for resistance. This resistance may take the form of transgressive desire (Ammu and Velutha's relationship), collective memory and testimony (the survivors' voices in *The Gypsy Goddess*), or the refusal of silence (Kandasamy's insistence on naming the perpetrators of the Kilvenmani massacre). Thus, corporeal subjugation and corporeal resistance are not sequential stages but dialectically related processes: the body is simultaneously the site where power is most brutally exercised and where it is most persistently contested.

2.6 Research Gaps and Contribution

While scholars such as Almeida (2002), Herrero (2019), and Cherechés (2024) have examined embodiment in Roy and Kandasamy's work respectively, few studies have undertaken a sustained comparative analysis that examines how both authors deploy similar narrative strategies to represent corporeal subjugation and resistance across different historical and social contexts. Furthermore, existing scholarship has not adequately theorized the relationship between narrative form and embodied resistance—how the structural choices these authors make (fragmented temporality, polyphonic narration, stratigraphic layering) themselves enact a form of textual resistance to dominant narratives of violence and victimhood. This paper addresses these gaps by offering a comparative framework that foregrounds the dialectical relationship between vulnerability and agency, and by demonstrating how literary form becomes a mode of political intervention.

3. Methodology

This study employs close reading and comparative textual analysis as its primary methodological approaches. Close reading, as practiced in literary studies, involves sustained attention to the formal, linguistic, and rhetorical features of literary texts, examining how meaning is produced through specific textual strategies. This method is particularly appropriate for analyzing how Roy and Kandasamy deploy embodiment as both a thematic concern and a formal strategy, as it allows for detailed examination of how bodily experience is represented through narrative voice, imagery, syntax, and structure.

The comparative approach enables identification of both convergences and divergences in how the two authors engage with questions of embodiment, violence, and resistance. Rather than treating the texts as isolated artifacts, this method situates them within a broader tradition of South Asian feminist writing while attending to their specific historical, cultural, and political contexts. The comparison is not intended to establish a hierarchy or to subsume one text's concerns into the other's, but rather to illuminate how different positionalities—Roy's as a privileged Syrian Christian woman, Kandasamy's as a Dalit feminist activist—shape literary engagement with similar themes.

The analysis proceeds through several stages. First, the key passages are identified in each text where bodily experience is foregrounded, paying particular attention to moments of violence, desire, trauma, and resistance. Second, the formal strategies are analysed through which these moments are represented, examining narrative voice, temporality, imagery, and language. Third, these textual moments are situated within the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review, drawing on postcolonial feminism, Dalit feminism, and theories of embodiment. Finally, the two texts' approaches are compared to identify patterns and divergences that illuminate broader questions about the politics of representation in South Asian feminist literature.

The selection of textual passages for close reading analysis was guided by the following explicit criteria:

1. Thematic Relevance: Passages were selected based on their direct engagement with the central themes of this study—bodily violence, desire, and resistance. Specifically, those moments in the texts were prioritized where the body is explicitly foregrounded as a site of either subjugation (through physical violence, spatial confinement, or symbolic marking) or resistance (through transgressive desire, testimony, or refusal of silence).

2. Narrative Centrality: Those passages were focused that are structurally significant within each novel's narrative arc. For Roy's *The God of Small Things*, this includes the scenes depicting Ammu and Velutha's relationship, the police interrogation and torture of Velutha, and Ammu's confinement and death. For Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, this includes the chapters describing the lead-up to the Kilvenmani massacre, the massacre itself, and the testimonies of survivors.

3. Frequency and Repetition: Recurring motifs and images throughout each text were examined, as repetition often signals thematic importance. In Roy's novel, this includes repeated references to "Small Things," "Love Laws," and the imagery of water and drowning. In Kandasamy's text, this includes the recurring motifs of fire, land, and collective voice.

4. Symbolic Weight: Those passages were selected that employ rich figurative language—metaphor, simile, symbolism—as these moments often condense complex meanings and reveal the authors' aesthetic strategies for representing trauma and resistance. For example, Roy's use of the "History House" as a symbolic space where transgression occurs, or Kandasamy's use of the "goddess" figure as a symbol of both divine justice and human agency.

5. Representativeness: Finally, it is ensured that the selected passages were representative of

each author's broader narrative and stylistic approach, rather than anomalous or exceptional moments. This allows the analysis to make claims about the texts as wholes, not merely about isolated instances. These criteria were applied iteratively: an initial reading of both novels identified potential passages, which were then evaluated against these criteria, with final selections made based on their ability to illuminate the central research questions of this study.

This methodology is informed by feminist commitments to centring women's experiences and challenging dominant narratives, while remaining attentive to the ethical complexities of representing violence and trauma. Following Raghavan (2023), it is sought to resist the binary between victimhood and agency, instead examining how both texts present complex portraits of survival, suffering, and resistance. The goal is not to recuperate these texts for a predetermined political position, but rather to examine how they themselves theorize the relationship between embodiment and power.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Inscribing Vulnerability: The Body as Site of Systemic Violence

Both Roy and Kandasamy depict the body as a surface upon which systemic violence is inscribed, yet they do so through markedly different narrative strategies that reflect their distinct political and aesthetic commitments. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy employs a fragmented, non-linear narrative that circles obsessively around moments of bodily violation, never fully representing them but instead approaching them through accumulation of sensory detail and metaphoric displacement. The novel's treatment of Ammu's body exemplifies this strategy. Ammu is repeatedly described through images of decay and dissolution: "She had deep dimples when she smiled. Her eyes were always somewhere else" (Roy, 1997, p. 44). This elsewhere-ness of Ammu's gaze signals her fundamental alienation from the social world that seeks to contain her, while the emphasis on her physical features—dimples, eyes, the "viable, die-able age" of her body—marks her as an object of both desire and violence.

The novel's most explicit representation of violence against Ammu's body comes not in the scene of her beating by Mammachi, which is narrated elliptically, but in the accumulation of small humiliations and constraints that shape her daily existence. When Ammu returns to her family home after leaving her abusive husband, she is relegated to a small room, her movements monitored, her interactions with her children regulated. Roy writes: "She had to be grateful. Anything. Anything at all. She was a millstone around their necks" (Roy, 1997, p. 161). The metaphor of the millstone transforms Ammu's body from subject to object, from person to burden, enacting linguistically the dehumanization she experiences socially. This linguistic violence mirrors and enables the physical violence that will later be enacted upon her body.

The scene in which Mammachi beats Ammu with a brass vase is narrated from the children's perspective, filtered through their limited understanding and their terror. Roy writes: "Rahel saw her mother's body tense. Saw her mother's eyes close. Saw her mother's mouth open. Saw her mother's teeth. Saw her mother's tongue. Saw her mother's spit" (Roy, 1997, p. 45). The repetition of "saw" and the fragmentation of Ammu's body into discrete parts—eyes, mouth, teeth, tongue, spit—enacts formally the violence being described. Ammu is literally dismembered by the narrative gaze, reduced to body parts rather than recognized as a whole person. Yet this fragmentation also serves a protective function, allowing the children (and the reader) to witness the violence without being overwhelmed by it. The narrative strategy thus mirrors the psychological defence mechanisms through which trauma is processed.

In contrast, Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* employs a more direct, visceral style when depicting violence against Dalit bodies, yet this directness is complicated by the novel's polyphonic structure and its metafictional self-consciousness. The novel opens with a stark declaration: "This is a story of a massacre. This is a story of a village. This is a story of a people" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 1). The repetition of "this is a story" immediately establishes the text's awareness of its own constructedness, refusing the illusion of transparent representation. Yet the content of what is being narrated—a massacre—demands a different kind of attention than the self-reflexive play might suggest.

Kandasamy's depiction of the Kilvenmani massacre itself is delayed, approached through multiple narrative frames and perspectives. When it finally arrives, the violence is described with unflinching detail: "The flames rose higher. The screams grew louder. The smell of burning flesh filled the air. Forty-four people burned alive. Twenty-three women. Sixteen children. Five men" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 198). The staccato sentences, the precise enumeration of bodies, the sensory details of flames, screams, and smell—all work to make the violence viscerally present to the reader. Yet even here, Kandasamy refuses simple realism. The passage continues: "But this is not how I want to tell this story. This is not how I want you to read this story. This is not how I want you to remember this story" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 199). The metafictional interruption forces the reader to confront their own position as consumer of narratives of violence, challenging the voyeuristic pleasure that can accompany representations of suffering.

As Cherechés (2024) argues, Kandasamy's novel demonstrates that "somatic trauma caused by caste-based oppression does not stop in the bone but has the ability to penetrate the inner psyche of Dalits in multiple and unexpected ways." The novel's representation of violence extends beyond the physical to encompass the psychological and spiritual dimensions of trauma. The character of Ponna, for instance, is described as carrying the weight of generations of oppression in her body: "Her back was bent from years of bending. Her hands were calloused from years of labour. Her eyes were tired from years of watching" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 87). The repetition of "years" emphasizes the temporal dimension of caste violence, its accumulation across a lifetime and across generations. This is what Cherechés terms "insidious trauma"—not a single catastrophic event but an ongoing condition of oppression that shapes subjectivity at the most fundamental level. Both novels thus depict the body as a site where systemic violence is inscribed, yet they do so through different formal strategies that reflect their distinct political commitments. Roy's elliptical, metaphoric approach emphasizes the unspeakability of trauma, the way violence exceeds representation. Kandasamy's more direct yet metafictionally framed approach insists on the necessity of naming violence while remaining aware of the ethical complexities of representation. Both strategies challenge readers to confront their own complicity in systems of violence, refusing the comfort of aesthetic distance.

4.2 Transgressive Bodies: Desire, Caste, and the Love Laws

The concept of transgressive desire is central to both novels, yet it operates differently in each text. In *The God of Small Things*, the transgression is primarily individual and sexual: Ammu's desire for Velutha, a Dalit man, violates what Roy terms the "Love Laws"—"the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy, 1997, p. 33). These laws are not merely social conventions but are enforced through violence, as the novel's tragic conclusion demonstrates. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha is represented as both beautiful and doomed, a moment of utopian possibility that is brutally crushed by the social order it threatens.

Roy's representation of Ammu and Velutha's physical relationship is notable for its lyricism and its emphasis on mutual desire and pleasure. The famous "History House" scene, where they consummate their relationship, is narrated through a series of sensory impressions and metaphoric transformations: "They lay under the mangosteen tree, where the earth was cool and damp. He touched her. She touched him. They were strangers who had met in the night" (Roy, 1997, p. 336). The simplicity of the language—"He touched her. She touched him"—emphasizes the mutuality and equality of their desire, refusing the hierarchies that structure their social world. The metaphor of strangers meeting in the night suggests both the transgressive nature of their encounter and its quality of revelation, as if they are discovering not just each other but new possibilities of being.

Yet this moment of transcendence is immediately undercut by the novel's awareness of the violence that will follow. Roy writes: "They had no idea that they were being watched. That someone was making a note of their transgression. That the Love Laws were being broken" (Roy, 1997, p. 337). The shift from the intimate "they" to the impersonal "someone" and the passive construction "were being broken" signals the intrusion of social power into the private space of desire. The body that was momentarily free becomes again a site of surveillance and control.

Almeida (2002) argues that Roy's novel "transgresses several social and historical rules in terms of both gender and race issues," positioning the intercaste relationship as a fundamental challenge to the caste system. The transgression is not merely sexual but ontological: by loving across caste lines, Ammu and Velutha assert the possibility of a social world organized according to different principles. Yet the novel's tragic ending—Velutha beaten to death by police, Ammu expelled from her family, the twins separated—demonstrates the violent enforcement of caste boundaries. The body that transgresses is a body that must be punished, disciplined, destroyed.

The novel also explores transgression through the figure of Velutha himself, whose very presence in certain spaces constitutes a violation of caste norms. When Velutha comes to the Ayemenem house to do carpentry work, his physical beauty and skill are repeatedly emphasized: "He was called Velutha—which means White in Malayalam—because he was so black. His skin was the colour of a ripe mango seed. He was as thin as a wire. He had a way of walking that was all his own" (Roy, 1997, p. 73). The ironic naming—calling the darkest person "White"—highlights the arbitrary yet rigidly enforced nature of caste distinctions. Velutha's blackness, his thinness, his distinctive walk—all mark him as different, as other, yet also as beautiful and desirable. The novel thus challenges the aesthetic hierarchies that align upper caste with beauty and lower caste with ugliness, instead presenting Velutha as an object of desire whose body disrupts these hierarchies.

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, transgression operates less through individual desire than through collective resistance. The novel depicts the agricultural labourers' strike as a form of bodily transgression: by refusing to work, by occupying public space, by demanding fair wages, the Dalit workers assert their bodies as sites of value and dignity rather than mere instruments of labour. Kandasamy writes: "They stood in the fields. They stood in the streets. They stood in front of the landlords' houses. They stood and they stood and they stood" (Kandasamy,

2014, p. 112). The repetition of “they stood” emphasizes the physical act of standing as a form of resistance. To stand rather than to bend, to occupy space rather than to efface oneself, to be visible rather than invisible—these are acts of bodily transgression in a caste system that demands Dalit abjection.

The novel also explores transgression through the figure of the female body that refuses its assigned role. The character of Ponna, who participates in the strike despite her husband’s objections, represents a double transgression: against caste hierarchy and against patriarchal control. Kandasamy writes: “Ponna walked to the meeting. Her husband shouted. Her mother-in-law cursed. Her children cried. But Ponna walked. She walked with her head high. She walked with her back straight. She walked like a woman who knew her worth” (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 134). The emphasis on Ponna’s posture—head high, back straight—marks her body as a site of dignity and resistance. The act of walking, of moving through space, becomes a political act, a refusal of the constraints that would keep her confined to domestic space.

Yet Kandasamy’s novel is also deeply aware of the costs of transgression. The massacre that concludes the novel is explicitly framed as punishment for the workers’ transgression of caste boundaries. The landlords who order the burning of the hut are enforcing not just economic hierarchy but caste hierarchy, punishing the Dalit workers for daring to assert their humanity. The novel thus demonstrates what Mangat and Gill (2024) term the “negotiation between speech and silence” that characterizes Dalit women’s resistance: the necessity of speaking out against oppression is always balanced against the very real dangers of doing so.

4.3 Collective Trauma and Corporeal Annihilation

The representation of collective trauma is central to *The Gypsy Goddess* and operates as a crucial subtext in *The God of Small Things*. Kandasamy’s novel explicitly engages with the Kilvenmani massacre as a historical event that demands literary representation, yet it does so with acute awareness of the ethical and aesthetic challenges involved. As Menozzi (2020) argues, Kandasamy reimagines the novelist as “a digger excavating overlapping grounds of history and reassembling them in a metafictional, multidimensional narrative composition.” This archaeological metaphor suggests that historical trauma is not simply past but is layered, sedimented, requiring careful excavation and reconstruction.

The novel’s structure enacts this stratigraphic approach through its non-linear temporality and its incorporation of multiple genres and voices. The massacre itself is approached from multiple angles: through the perspective of the victims, through historical documents, through the author’s own metafictional commentary, through poetry and song. This multiplicity refuses the singularity of official history, insisting instead on the complexity and contestation that characterize any historical event. Kandasamy writes: “There are many ways to tell this story. I could tell it as a tragedy. I could tell it as a crime. I could tell it as a revolution. I could tell it as a love story. I could tell it as all of these things at once” (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 45). The conditional “I could” emphasizes the choices involved in historical representation, the way that narrative form shapes historical meaning. Jenitta et al. (2025) explore how Kandasamy’s novel, alongside other contemporary works, uses “tales of trauma and memory” to interrogate historical violence and its ongoing effects on marginalized communities.

The novel’s depiction of the massacre itself is preceded by extensive attention to the daily lives, hopes, and struggles of the agricultural labourers. This narrative strategy serves multiple functions: it humanizes the victims, refusing their reduction to statistics or symbols; it demonstrates the structural conditions that led to the massacre, situating it within a longer history of caste oppression; and it creates emotional investment in the characters, making their deaths more devastating for the reader. When the massacre finally occurs, its horror is amplified by our knowledge of who these people were, what they hoped for, what they lost.

Cherechés (2024) argues that the novel demonstrates the “generational transmissibility of trauma,” showing how caste violence shapes not just individual lives but entire communities across time. The novel includes passages that trace the history of caste oppression in the village across generations, demonstrating how each generation inherits the trauma of the previous one. This intergenerational transmission operates not just psychologically but materially: through poverty, through lack of access to education and resources, through the ongoing violence that marks Dalit bodies as disposable. The novel thus presents what Cherechés terms “pre-traumatic stress”—the anticipation of violence that shapes Dalit subjectivity even before any specific violent event occurs.

In *The God of Small Things*, collective trauma operates more subtly, woven into the fabric of the narrative through the accumulation of small violences and the pervasive atmosphere of dread. The novel’s non-linear structure, which begins with the knowledge of Velutha’s death and Sophie Mol’s drowning, creates a sense of inevitability, as if the tragedy is always already present, shaping every moment of the narrative. This temporal structure mirrors the experience of trauma, in which past events continue to intrude upon the present, refusing to remain safely in the past.

The novel also gestures toward collective trauma through its representation of the twins, Rahel and Estha, whose childhood experiences of violence and loss shape their adult lives in profound ways. The twins’ separation after Sophie Mol’s death is described as a kind of death itself: “They were two-egg twins. Dizygotic. They looked nothing alike. But they thought together. They felt together. They hurt together” (Roy, 1997, p. 52). The emphasis on their togetherness makes their separation all the more devastating. When they are reunited as adults, they are described as “a pair of actors trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative” (Roy, 1997, p. 19), suggesting the way trauma has arrested their development, leaving them unable to move forward into adult life.

The novel’s representation of Estha’s silence is particularly significant as a marker of trauma. After being sexually abused by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and after witnessing Velutha’s beating and death, Estha stops speaking: “The quietness swallowed him. It took away his words. It took away his voice. It took away his self” (Roy, 1997, p. 12). The repetition of “it took away” emphasizes the

violence of this silencing, the way trauma literally robs the subject of the capacity for self-expression. Yet the novel also suggests that silence can be a form of resistance, a refusal to participate in the social world that has caused such harm.

4.4 Resistance Through Embodiment: Reclaiming Agency

Despite their emphasis on vulnerability and violence, both novels also depict the body as a site of resistance and agency. This resistance takes multiple forms, from the assertion of desire to the refusal of victimhood to the collective organization of labour. Importantly, both novels resist the binary between victimhood and agency that Raghavan (2023) critiques, instead presenting complex portraits of how subjects navigate structural constraints while asserting their humanity.

In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu's desire for Velutha represents a form of bodily resistance to the Love Laws that structure her world. Her willingness to risk everything for this relationship—her security, her children's future, her life—demonstrates what Kapur (2012) terms "erotic justice," the assertion of sexual autonomy as a fundamental human right. The novel's lyrical depiction of their physical relationship emphasizes pleasure, mutuality, and joy, refusing the reduction of intercaste relationships to either victimization or transgression alone. Roy writes: "They were strangers who had met in the night. They had no history. They had no future. They had only this moment, this night, this touch" (Roy, 1997, p. 336). The emphasis on the present moment, freed from the weight of history and the anxiety of the future, suggests a utopian possibility, a glimpse of a world organized according to different principles.

Yet the novel is also deeply aware that individual acts of resistance, however courageous, cannot overturn systemic oppression. Ammu's resistance leads not to liberation but to her expulsion from her family, her early death, and her children's trauma. The novel thus presents a tragic vision of resistance, in which the assertion of agency is simultaneously necessary and doomed. This tragic structure has been criticized by some scholars as reinforcing narratives of Dalit victimization, yet it can also be read as a realistic assessment of the costs of resistance under conditions of extreme oppression.

The novel also depicts resistance through the figure of Velutha, whose skill as a carpenter and his political consciousness mark him as a threat to the social order. Velutha is described as having "a Touchable's features—a mobile, sensitive mouth, an intelligent forehead" (Roy, 1997, p. 73), a description that challenges the physiognomic assumptions that underlie caste hierarchy. His involvement in communist organizing represents a collective form of resistance, an attempt to build solidarity across caste lines. Yet the novel also demonstrates the limits of this solidarity: when Velutha is accused of kidnapping and rape, his communist comrades abandon him, unwilling to risk their own positions by defending a Dalit man accused of violating an upper-caste woman.

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, resistance is primarily collective rather than individual, enacted through the agricultural labourers' strike and their demand for fair wages. Kandasamy depicts the strike as a moment of collective empowerment, in which Dalit workers assert their value and dignity: "They were no longer slaves. They were no longer servants. They were workers. They were citizens. They were human beings" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 145). The progression from "slaves" to "human beings" marks a fundamental transformation in consciousness, a refusal of the dehumanization that caste hierarchy imposes. The emphasis on collective identity—"they were"—highlights the importance of solidarity and collective action in challenging systemic oppression.

The novel also depicts resistance through the figure of the female body that refuses its assigned passivity. The women who participate in the strike are described as "walking with their heads high, their backs straight, their voices loud" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 156). This bodily comportment—head high, back straight, voice loud—marks a refusal of the abjection that caste and gender hierarchy demand. The act of speaking, of making oneself heard, is itself a form of resistance in a system that demands Dalit women's silence.

Yet like Roy, Kandasamy is deeply aware of the costs of resistance. The massacre that concludes the novel is explicitly framed as punishment for the workers' transgression, a violent reassertion of caste hierarchy in response to its challenge. The novel thus presents a complex vision of resistance, in which collective action is both necessary and dangerous, both empowering and potentially fatal. This complexity refuses simple narratives of either victimization or heroic resistance, instead presenting a nuanced portrait of how oppressed communities navigate structural violence.

The novel's metafictional frame also enacts a form of resistance at the level of narrative itself. By repeatedly interrupting the story to comment on the process of its telling, Kandasamy asserts her authority as author and challenges the reader's passive consumption of narratives of violence. She writes: "I am the author. I am in control. I decide who lives and who dies. I decide what you know and what you don't know. I decide how you feel" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 178). This assertion of authorial control is itself a form of resistance, a refusal of the erasure and silencing that has characterized official histories of the massacre. By claiming the right to tell this story, in her own way, on her own terms, Kandasamy enacts a form of epistemic resistance, challenging dominant narratives and asserting Dalit voices and perspectives.

4.5 Roy's Authorial Perspective and the "Small Things" Aesthetic

A critical question that arises in reading Roy's novel is the matter of authorial positionality: Roy herself is a privileged Syrian Christian, the same community as the Ipe family in the novel, and her narration of Dalit interiority—particularly Velutha's subjectivity and the violence enacted upon his body—raises concerns about appropriation and the ethics of representation. How does Roy, writing from a position of relative privilege, navigate the risk of speaking for rather than with marginalized communities? Roy's aesthetic strategy of focusing on "Small Things"—the minute, local, sensory details of everyday life—functions as a formal mechanism to address this ethical dilemma. Rather than claiming omniscient access to Velutha's inner consciousness or presuming to speak authoritatively about Dalit experience,

Roy's narrative dwells on the material, observable details of bodily experience: the texture of skin, the smell of wood shavings, the sound of breathing, the visual details of physical space. This focus on the granular and the sensory creates what might be called an "aesthetic of proximity" that acknowledges the limits of cross-caste understanding while still insisting on the ethical imperative to witness and represent violence.

Furthermore, Roy's choice to focalize much of the narrative through the children's perspectives—Estha and Rahel, who are themselves marginalized within the family structure and who do not yet fully comprehend caste hierarchies—creates a narrative position that is simultaneously inside and outside the dominant social order. The children's perspective allows Roy to defamiliarize caste violence, rendering it strange and unjustifiable, without claiming to inhabit Velutha's subject position directly. When the children witness Velutha's torture by the police, the narrative registers the horror through their sensory perceptions and emotional responses, rather than presuming to narrate Velutha's own experience of that torture.

This narrative strategy does not fully resolve the ethical tensions inherent in cross-caste representation, but it demonstrates a self-conscious awareness of those tensions. Roy's focus on "Small Things" becomes a way of acknowledging that certain experiences—particularly the lived reality of caste-based violence—may exceed the representational capacity of those who have not experienced them directly, while still insisting that silence or erasure is not an ethical alternative. The "Small Things" aesthetic thus functions as both a narrative technique and an ethical stance, one that seeks to bear witness to violence without appropriating the voices of its victims.

4.6 Comparative Analysis: Convergences and Divergences

A sustained comparative analysis of *The God of Small Things* and *The Gypsy Goddess* reveals both significant convergences and important divergences in how Roy and Kandasamy engage with questions of embodiment, violence, and resistance. These similarities and differences reflect not only the authors' distinct aesthetic commitments but also their different social positions and political projects.

Convergences:

Both novels employ non-linear narrative structures that disrupt chronological time, creating a sense of temporal dislocation that mirrors the experience of trauma. In Roy's novel, the narrative circles obsessively around the central traumatic events—Velutha's death, Sophie Mol's drowning, the twins' separation—approaching them from multiple angles but never fully resolving them. This circular structure enacts the way trauma refuses to remain in the past, instead intruding repeatedly into the present. Similarly, Kandasamy's novel approaches the Kilvenmani massacre through multiple temporal frames, moving backward and forward in time, incorporating historical documents and contemporary reflections. As Menozzi (2020) argues, this "non-synchronous aesthetic" replaces chronological order with a "stratigraphic process" that better captures the layered nature of historical trauma.

Both novels also employ highly sensory, visceral language when depicting bodily experience, particularly experiences of violence and desire. Roy's prose is notable for its attention to sensory detail—the smell of rain, the taste of mangoes, the feel of skin against skin. This sensory richness serves multiple functions: it grounds the narrative in material, bodily experience; it creates emotional intensity; and it challenges the abstraction that often characterizes discussions of systemic oppression. Kandasamy similarly employs visceral language, particularly in her depictions of labour and violence. Her descriptions of agricultural work emphasize the physical toll it takes on bodies: "Their backs bent. Their hands bled. Their feet cracked" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 89). This attention to bodily suffering makes visible the material conditions of caste oppression, refusing its reduction to abstract social structure.

Both novels also centre female bodies as sites of particular vulnerability and resistance. Ammu in Roy's novel and the female agricultural labourers in Kandasamy's novel are marked by their gender as well as their caste position, facing forms of violence that are specifically gendered. Yet both novels also depict these women as agents, capable of desire, resistance, and solidarity. This dual emphasis on vulnerability and agency challenges simplistic narratives of either pure victimization or heroic resistance, instead presenting complex portraits of how women navigate structural oppression.

Both authors also employ metafictional strategies that draw attention to the constructed nature of their narratives. Roy's novel includes numerous moments of narrative self-consciousness, such as the repeated phrase "Things can change in a day" (Roy, 1997, p. 32), which functions as both a thematic statement and a comment on narrative structure. Kandasamy's metafictional strategies are more explicit and extensive, with the author-narrator repeatedly interrupting the story to comment on the process of its telling. These metafictional elements serve similar functions in both novels: they challenge the illusion of transparent representation, they assert authorial agency, and they implicate the reader in the ethical complexities of consuming narratives of violence.

Divergences:

Despite these convergences, the novels also diverge in significant ways that reflect the authors' different social positions and political commitments. Most fundamentally, Roy's novel centres an individual, intercaste relationship, while Kandasamy's centres a collective, caste-based struggle. This difference reflects not just aesthetic choice but political orientation: Roy's novel is primarily concerned with the personal costs of transgressing social boundaries, while Kandasamy's is concerned with collective resistance to systemic oppression.

This difference in focus is reflected in the novels' treatment of caste. In *The God of Small Things*, caste operates primarily as a constraint on individual desire and mobility. The Love Laws that prohibit Ammu and Velutha's relationship are presented as arbitrary and cruel, yet the novel does not extensively explore the material conditions of caste oppression or the history of anti-caste struggle. Velutha's political

consciousness and his involvement in communist organizing are mentioned but not developed in detail. The novel's focus remains on the personal and the familial, with caste operating as a tragic obstacle to individual happiness.

In contrast, *The Gypsy Goddess* centres caste as a structural system of exploitation and violence. The novel extensively depicts the material conditions of Dalit agricultural labourers—their poverty, their lack of access to land and resources, their subjection to upper-caste violence. It also situates the Kilvenmani massacre within a longer history of caste oppression and anti-caste resistance, including references to the communist movement, land reform struggles, and Dalit political organizing. Kandasamy's novel thus presents caste not as an individual tragedy but as a systemic problem requiring collective political response.

This difference in political orientation is also reflected in the novels' treatment of resistance. In Roy's novel, resistance is primarily individual and ultimately tragic. Ammu's assertion of desire leads to her expulsion and early death; Velutha's political organizing leads to his brutal murder; the twins' attempt to protect their mother leads to their lifelong trauma. The novel presents a deeply pessimistic vision of the possibilities for resistance under conditions of extreme oppression, suggesting that individual acts of transgression, however courageous, cannot overturn systemic violence.

Kandasamy's novel, while also depicting the violent suppression of resistance, maintains a more explicitly political orientation. The massacre is presented not as the inevitable result of individual transgression but as a specific act of class and caste violence, carried out by identifiable perpetrators who are never held accountable. The novel's metafictional frame allows Kandasamy to explicitly articulate a political analysis of the massacre, situating it within broader structures of caste capitalism and state violence. The novel concludes not with resignation but with a call to remember and to continue the struggle: "This is not the end. This is not the end. This is not the end" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 245). The repetition of "this is not the end" insists on the ongoing nature of anti-caste struggle, refusing closure and demanding continued resistance.

The novels also diverge in their treatment of narrative authority. Roy's novel employs a third person omniscient narrator who moves fluidly between different characters' perspectives, creating a sense of intimacy and interiority. This narrative strategy emphasizes the psychological and emotional dimensions of the characters' experiences, inviting readerly

identification and empathy. Yet it also raises questions about the politics of representation: what does it mean for Roy, writing from a position of relative privilege, to narrate the interior lives of Dalit characters like Velutha? Some critics have argued that this narrative strategy risks appropriating Dalit experience, speaking for rather than with Dalit communities.

Kandasamy's novel addresses this question of narrative authority directly through its metafictional frame. By repeatedly foregrounding her own position as author and by explicitly discussing the ethical and political challenges of representing the massacre, Kandasamy asserts her right to tell this story while also acknowledging the limitations and responsibilities involved. Her position as a Dalit woman gives her a different relationship to this material than Roy has to hers, yet Kandasamy does not claim unmediated access to the experiences of the Kilvenmani victims. Instead, she presents her narrative as one possible telling among many, shaped by her own political commitments and aesthetic choices.

Finally, the novels diverge in their treatment of hope and futurity. *The God of Small Things* is structured by a profound sense of loss and irreparability. The novel begins with the knowledge that the central relationships have been destroyed, that the family has been shattered, that the twins have been permanently damaged. The narrative's circular structure, returning repeatedly to these traumatic events, suggests that there is no moving beyond them, no possibility of healing or redemption. The novel's final image—of Rahel and Estha reunited but unable to truly connect—reinforces this sense of irreparable loss.

The Gypsy Goddess, despite its depiction of horrific violence, maintains a more complex relationship to hope and futurity. The novel's metafictional frame allows Kandasamy to move beyond the immediate aftermath of the massacre to consider its ongoing significance. She writes: "The dead are not dead. They live in our memories. They live in our struggles. They live in our refusal to forget" (Kandasamy, 2014, p. 243). This insistence on memory as a form of resistance, on the ongoing presence of the dead in contemporary struggles, suggests a different temporal orientation than Roy's novel. While Roy's novel is haunted by the past in a way that forecloses the future, Kandasamy's novel suggests that remembering the past is necessary for building a different future. These convergences and divergences illuminate the heterogeneity of South Asian feminist literary practice. Both novels position the body as a site of political struggle, both employ experimental narrative techniques, both challenge dominant narratives of caste and gender. Yet they do so from different positions and toward different ends, reflecting the diversity of feminist politics and aesthetics in contemporary India. Roy's novel offers a tragic, intimate portrait of how caste hierarchy destroys individual lives and relationships. Kandasamy's novel offers a more explicitly political analysis of caste violence as systemic and collective, demanding not just empathy but political action.

5. Conclusion

This analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) shows how both novels use the body as a space where violence is both inflicted and resisted. Both authors refuse to separate the body from politics, showing how power operates through physical experience. The study reveals several key findings. First, both novels use non-linear storytelling and innovative techniques that mirror how trauma disrupts time. Second, both locate women's bodies as particularly vulnerable due to caste and gender, yet also as sites of resistance. Third, both reject simple victim-versus-agent frameworks, presenting complex portraits of how people navigate oppression while maintaining their humanity. However, the novels differ significantly. Roy

focuses on individual, intercaste desire with a tragic vision, while Kandasamy centres collective, caste-based struggle with explicit political commitment. These differences reflect their distinct social positions and understandings of literature's political role. Both novels demonstrate that literature can challenge dominant narratives by making structural violence visible and imagining alternatives. By presenting the body as simultaneously vulnerable and resistant, Roy and Kandasamy refuse simple narratives, instead showing how people assert their humanity within oppressive systems. Their work proves the body is not just where power acts, but where it can be contested and resistance can emerge.

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Author contributions

Mohd Shafi Dar conceptualized the study and was responsible for the overall research design and preparation of the Introduction and Conclusion sections. Shouket Ahmad Tilwani conducted the Literature Review and developed the Methodology section. Rashma Siraj carried out the Textual Analysis and Discussion and contributed to the interpretation of the findings. Mohd Shafi Dar drafted the manuscript, while all authors critically reviewed, revised, and refined the final version. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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