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INDIAN FEMINIST THOUGHT

INDEX

UNIT 1

TARABAI SHINDE: STRI PURUSH TULANA

Q1. Describe Stri Purush Tulana is a comparison between men and women.

Or

Write the theme of Stri Purush Tulana.

Or

Write a note on the appropriateness of the title Stri Purush Tulana.

Ans. One of India's earliest feminists, Tarabai Shinde wrote the pioneering *Stree Purush Tulana* that challenged religion and patriarchy.

"*But do men not suffer from the same flaws that women are supposed to have?*"- **Tarabai Shinde**

Not one to shy away from asking tough questions, Tarabai Shinde's published work *Stree Purush Tulana* (Comparison between women and men) is a searing piece that expresses her deep agony over the discrimination caused because of patriarchy and caste.

One of India's earliest feminists, Tarabai's *Stree Purush Tulana* was published in 1882 in Marathi and posed tough questions that openly challenged Hindu scriptures for its role in women's oppression.

Her writing that challenged the caste system and patriarchy appeared in the public domain more than six decades before feminist existentialist and activist Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

Stree Purush Tulana dared to question the patriarchy

Stree Purush Tulana was written in response to an article that appeared in the conservative newspaper Pune Vaibhav about Vijaylakshmi, a young widow being

sentenced to death after she aborted her unborn child. The article in Pune Vaibhav severely criticised Vijaylakshmi of having sexual relations and Tarabai incensed by the insulting piece responded with her own critique of upper caste patriarchy where she refused to accept male superiority and questioned the status quo when she wrote, “What’s good for a man ought to be good for woman as well”.

Replete with questions on core concepts surrounding gender equality and the Hindu scriptures, she asks of the Gods, “You are supposed to be omnipotent and freely accessible to all. You are said to be completely impartial. What does that mean? That you have never been known to be partial. But wasn’t it you who created both men and women?”

Tarabai questions the sheer discrimination that was meted out to girls and women that ranged from no right to education to **exclusion of widows** from any rights and attacked the manner in which society and media perpetuated these discriminations. The 52 page work of prose asked why such dual standards existed for men and women and shared that she had to write and put forth her views to “stop treating all women as if they had committed a crime and making their lives a living hell because of it”.

Stree Purush Tulana was severely criticised and caused a furore and remained in the background till the 1970s when it was brought back to life by S.G Malshe who republished it in 1975. Tarabai worked alongside educational reformers like Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule where she became a founding member of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

If one were to read her text in today’s context where we witness statements from across the world of the supposed “role of women” in society we realize that even after more than a hundred years, women across the world have been subjected to deeply **entrenched gender inequality** that it we are still constantly being dictated how to live and function!

A Comparison Between Women and Men is the translation of Tarabai Shinde’s Stree Purush Tulana published in 1882 originally written in Marathi. It was translated by Rosalind O’Hanlon in 2007. Shinde wrote the book as a response to a newspaper article in Pune Vaibhav which was known for publishing articles with no regard for women’s rights. An article in this newspaper villainized a young widow (Vijaylakshmi) who was compelled to kill her child to avoid shame. This piece of writing angered Shinde to an extent that she penned a book chiding

the masculine readership and their hypocrisy towards women in an increasingly patriarchal society. This review aims to analyze the relevance of this revolutionary 19th century text in the context of the women's movement in contemporary India. Tarabai's account is not just an attack on Brahmanism like her contemporary Jyotirao Phule but also reflects her political marginality as a woman. The oppressors in each of their cases were different as they came from different social locations. For Phule, it was the Brahmanic religion as it oppressed people from the lower caste and for Shinde, it was the men who oppressed women. Marginalization took place at different levels which is why the lens of intersectionality becomes important. Shinde, an upper caste Brahmin was enraged by the power men wielded on women's agency. She fought against the systemic discrimination of women under patriarchal society. She critiqued the politics of gender in colonial society by indicating that men had gained a 'new range of powers' under the British which made them conceited as they tried to confine women to their houses depriving them of such benefits, shackling them in a rigid religious culture for which they had no regard. This new range of powers included 'men traveling in trains, dressing like babus' (p. 93-94), a blatant mimesis of the western culture hence they were in no position to claim that they were defenders of dharma.

The title of the book is refreshing as she places 'women' before 'men' which is not the case when spoken colloquially. The language she uses also has special significance. It is unabashedly unfiltered and relatable targeted towards having a wider readership and audience, especially amongst the menfolk. She is fearless in critiquing their ignorance towards issues faced by women. She does not make a plea to men but writes as though she is criticising them for their ignorance in an attempt to open their eyes to the sheer hypocrisy on their part while making the lives of women unlivable. While Indian men imbibed the ways of the English, women were to be shackled in patriarchal traditions; yet it was the Indian man who was considered the flag bearer of dharma.

In her own words, she wrote the book in a 'very biting language'. Shinde, in the introduction, states that the aim of her book is to 'honour all my sister country women' (p. 75). Shinde aspired to speak on behalf of all Indian women as she was

deeply troubled by the behaviour of the menfolk and the gross narratives that newspapers spun villainizing women in their articles. She was not particularly interested in investigating larger intersectionalities as she says, 'I'm not looking at particular castes or families here. It is just a comparison between women and men' (p.75). Shinde wanted to point out the differing lifestyles of women and men during the colonial period shedding light on the hypocrisy of men. One could say that such a narrative was her perception as a privileged woman who had access to education but it was revolutionary as this text became an exemplar of the exercise of agency by a woman who steered away from the stereotypical image of a 'bhadramahila'. As stated earlier, she chose to place women before men in the title of her book, which itself is a radical move.

Tarabai describes herself as 'a poor woman without any real intelligence, who's been kept locked up and confined in the proper old Maratha manner'. Such a self perception is valid because Tarabai was educated because of the freedom that was given to her on account of her privileges and views of her father. It was a relative freedom that flowed from the whims of the men in her life. She then mentions that she was still expected to behave as a traditional Maratha woman and follow the socio-cultural norms of being a woman. She lacked the socially acceptable feminine qualities, probably due to her exposure to literature. Her outspoken nature portrayed her as 'a tough , independent and somewhat pugnacious woman.' She wrote,

'these days the newspapers are always writing about poor helpless women and the wicked things they do. Why won't any of you come forward and put a stop to these great calamities?'(p. 79)

The juxtaposition in the use of words, 'poor helpless', and 'wicked' is almost ironic, given the times she was writing in. Women were confined to their homes behind the purdah because they needed constant protection, but at the same time were also blamed for every evil in society (p.87). This also expresses her disdain for print media which created or popularised norms like pativrata and the 'right' conduct of women. This later evolved to a Victorianized pativrata. Marriage assumed particular importance in late pre-colonial India. Marriage was often used

as a tool to consolidate power. The character of women was often determined by print media through articles written about the lives of women from the male gaze. The portrayal of women as bhadramahila emerged first among reformist circlesin Bengal but was diluted by the time it reached other parts of the country which were increasingly Brahminical. Victorianized pativrata, a 'patchwork solution'was a new form of womanhood that was a fusion of older Brahminical values of pativrata, of feminine self-sacrifice and devotion to the husband, with Victorian emphasis upon women as enlightened mothers and companions to men in their own 'separate sphere' of their home. The 'educated wife' rapidly gained traction. The establishment of schools for girls received backlash from conservatives like Tilak because they feared that it would make them 'insubordinate' and devoid of traditional virtues. Insubordination was just a mask, men seemed to be worried that educated women would not tolerate atrocities. Education was to be limited so that one could follow 'Victorianized pativrata'.

The reformist movements were influenced by the prevailing socio-cultural norms of the times. Shinde referred to them as 'a spare tit on a goat' (p. 85). The 'educated wife' was an easy escape wherein girls were sent to schools but prevented from entering the public sphere. This is a reality in many remote villages in India even today. Gender relations are not transformed but are circumscribed by the prevailing ideas of patriarchy wherein women are empowered within the socio-cultural constraints. One settles for a 'patchwork' without reaching for an 'alternative modernity' because a transformation or a rupture does not take place. A woman is not given a chance to exercise her agency because most of the decisions in her life are made by the men in her life. Tarabai Shinde's father Bapuji Hari Shinde was a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj, the reformist and anti-brahmin 'truth-seeking society' set up in Western India in 1873 by the Poona radical Jyotirao Phule. It is doubtful that she would have learned to read and write without her father's reformist commitments. Despite this 'relative freedom', Tarabai refers to herself as someone who has been 'kept locked up and confined in the proper old Maratha manner'. Regardless of such shortcomings, she was relatively free to pursue her education: reading,

writing, and publishing texts that were often not received in great light in marital homes.

Tarabai Shinde addresses issues like patriarchy and widow remarriage. She writes, women should be treated with dignity not shoved into a room with a barber who would shave her and wipe the Kumkum off her head (p. 79). Her account of Vijayalakshmi, the widow who had to murder her child to be accepted in society, brings out the plight of widows in the early 19th century. Women were often married at a young age to very old men for a price paid to the fathers of the brides. They were treated like cattle. Here she also addresses problems like child marriage. Shinde elaborates on the caste system which is relevant in the Indian context even in contemporary times wherein the women's question becomes heterogenous and has to be seen in the light of intersectionality. She also criticised Hindu religious scriptures that portrayed women without any agency of their own. Stree Purush Tulana is an explosive text, subject to many controversies at the time. It is bold, unfiltered and an honest account of the plight of women in pre-colonial and colonial times. It is relevant even today as one of the first modern Indian feminist texts that helps us locate feminism as a movement in the 19th century. As a movement, Indian feminism, in the 19th century, dealt with pressing issues such as widow remarriage, patriarchy in familial institutions, reclamation of agency in a society built to confine women in the private sphere, as women's bodies were considered markers of honour wherein every aspect of becoming a woman was dictated by norms set and regulated by men. The book is a great start for establishing the ideology of the movement, and understanding the formation of its social base. It also places a yardstick before us on the issues discussed, helping us measure the progress we have (or have not) made tackling such issues in the 21st century.

KAMLA BHASIN

WHAT IS PATRIARCHY?

Q.1 What is Patriarchy according to Kamla Bhasin? What do we mean by patriarchy?

Or

How does patriarchy actually manifest itself? Can we recognize it in our life?

Ans. Kamla Bhasin (24 April 1946 – 25 September 2021) was an Indian developmental feminist activist, poet, author and social scientist. Bhasin's work, that began in 1970, focused on gender education, human development and the media.[2][3] She lived in New Delhi, India.[4] She was best known for her work with Sangat - A Feminist Network and for her poem Kyunki main ladki hoon, mujhe padhna hai.[5] In 1995, she recited a refurbished, feminist version of the popular poem Azadi (Freedom) in a conference.

She spoke out against capitalism as an agent of the patriarchy, for objectifying women's bodies. However her revulsion of capitalism emerged from a much deeper political stand. She argued that the nature of the modern family is based in the concept of ownership. "This all started when private property came into existence. People wanted to pass on their legacy, but men did not know who their children were, only women were known as mothers because there were no families. That is when patriarchy came.", she said

Many of us involved with different programmes and

activities for women’s development over the years, have

found it necessary to understand the system which keeps women dominated and subordinated, and to unravel its workings in

order to work for women’s development in a systematic way. For years I looked at women’s oppression in a piecemeal fashion; the fragments began to form a pattern when I started to look at them as part of a system- the system of

patriarchy. It was not easy to understand, initially; not being an academic I was not trained to immediately grasp, concepts and abstractions. Gradually, listening to friends who were academics, reading bits and pieces here and there, things became clearer. What really helped me was a month-long workshop on women and development that I organised in Bangladesh some years ago, with Amrita Chhachhi (of the Institute of Social Studies, the Hague) as resource person. That workshop clarified many issues and concepts, not just for me, but for most of the participants as well. Since then (1987) I have been looking for short and simply written articles on the subject of patriarchy, which I could share with women and men activists. Most of what- I had read was either too difficult to understand or too full of jargon, or it assumed prior knowledge of the subject. So Istarted initiating discussions on patriarchy in different workshops with the help of my notes and of Amrita's presentation at Bangladesh. During these discussions my own understanding became clearer, and I also found some articles and books which were very good. I decided to try to put all that I had read, liked and understood together in an accessible and, I hope, useful form. In this pamphlet, I try to look at patriarchy as we experience it in our lives and as a concept which explains women's subordination. (Some theories regarding its origin are introduced here but very briefly. For a more detailed understanding other readings will be necessary.) It is intended for activists who may not have access to books and journal or the kind of time required to go through them all;but I hope that the writers of whose work I have drawn upon will be illuminated and will encourage at least some activists to read more on the subject. What we desperately need is more conceptual work on the nature, origin and roots of patriarchy in South Asia so that we can understand our own situation better. The material is presented in a question and answer style, a format that I have used earlier in pamphlets on Feminism, and one that people find easy to assimilate.

"India needs a cultural revolution", said Bhasin. She resented that South Asia's women are shackled by a myriad of social customs and beliefs that embrace and straddle the patriarchy. "Often religion is used as a shield to justify patriarchy. When you question something, you are told, yeh toh hamara sanskar hai, riwaaj

hai (This is our culture, our traditions). And when this is done, it means logic has ended, belief has come in.", she told The Hindu in a 2013 interview.

She challenged patriarchal ideas in language, and questioned the validity and history of everyday words. The Hindi word swami, that is often used for a partner, for instance, implies 'lord' or 'owner', as does the word 'husband', which originates from animal husbandry. She adjudged all these customs against the constitution of India that offers every woman the right to equality and the promise of a dignified life.

Views on feminist theory

Bhasin rejected the notion that feminism is a western concept. She stressed that Indian feminism has its roots in its own struggles and tribulations. She said that she didn't become a feminist by reading other feminists, she became one as a part of a larger natural evolution from merely a development worker, to a feminist development worker. She said that it is the story of many others.

When asked what she had to say on the premise that the term feminism antagonizes a lot of people, she said, "People are not happy with feminism, and even if I call it XYZ, they will still be against. It is because they mind the fact that we want freedom, we want equality, and there are lots of people, customs, and traditions who don't want to give women freedom."

While she agreed that theory and action have to go hand in hand for change to come, she believed that feminist theory is important. Her workshops routinely consulted with and worked with social scientists, feminists and academics. They can be described as a marriage between action and theory.

She maintained that feminism is not a war between men and women. She said it is a fight between two ideologies. One that elevates men and gives them power, and the other, that advocates for equality.

UNIT 2

ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

“SULTANA’S DREAM” (STORY)

Q.1 Write the theme of “Sultana’s Dream”?

Or

Write a note that “Sultana’s Dream” is a feminist utopian novel.

Ans."This short book is a window opened too briefly onto a world whose exoticism is overshadowed only by its oppressiveness. Particularly chilling is Hossain's work's relevance to our times, as pointed out in the afterword when purdah and its variants are being revived in different social and religious movements."

—Publishers Weekly

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain or Begum Rokeya was a Bengali feminist author, educator, and political activist from British India or present-day Bangladesh. She is the pioneer of women’s liberation in South Asia. Her most significant work includes Matichur (A String of Sweet Pearls), Sultana’s Dream, Padmarag (Essence of the Lotus), and Abarodhbasini (The Confined Women).

Sultana’s Dream Analysis

Sultana’s Dream by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is a futuristic sci-fi feminist story that was first published in a Madras English newspaper called The Indian Ladies Magazine in 1905.

The story is set in a utopian place called Ladyland. In this story, the author reverses the gender roles, and we see the women as the dominant gender. In Ladyland, the women call the shots, and men live a confined life akin to the traditional Muslim purdah system. The women are the modern architects, engineers, and scientists of the world, and the author depicts a far more technically advanced, efficient, and peaceful world than the one we live in reality which is ruled by men.

The story takes witty potshots at the traditional patriarchal system and highlights the need and importance of gender equality, women's education, and agency.

Hossain emphasises how most of the world's problems are manmade, and if women take charge, most of these problems will cease to exist. A world ruled by women would mean lesser crime and more peace and harmony. In Hossain's utopian Ladyland, we see women on top as scientists and world leaders working collaboratively for the wellbeing of all, unlike a man's world on earth where it's competitive, chaotic, and destructive.

I found Sultana's Dream by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain ahead of its time, a progressive story that deals with the subjects of feminism, education, and environmentalism. It's not surprising because Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain knew how to read and write. A rarity for women born in those times. It's also no surprise that Sultana's Dream is among the first stories to be written in English by women in colonial times. The story is a distinct landmark in Indian Literature in English.

But what's shocking is that we still have the patriarchal system thick in place. It forces women to drop out of their workplaces after a particular stage of their life and the glass ceiling still exists. We still need more women in politics to protect our rights and interests. We still need more women scientists and environmentalists to take charge and help us live in a better, more equal and harmonious world.

It depicts a science fiction feminist utopia called Ladyland, in which women run everything and men are secluded, in a mirror-image of the traditional practice of *purdah*. The women are aided by technology which enables laborless farming and flying cars; the women scientists have discovered how to trap solar power and control the weather. This results in "a sort of gender-based Planet of the Apes where the roles are reversed and the men are locked away in a technologically advanced future."[4][5]

There, traditional stereotypes such as "Men have bigger brains" and women are "naturally weak" are countered with logic such as "an elephant also has a bigger and heavier brain" and "a lion is stronger than a man" and yet neither of them dominates men.[3] In Ladyland crime is eliminated, since men were considered responsible for all of it. The workday is only two hours long, since men used to waste six hours of each day in smoking. The religion is one of love and truth. Purity is held above all, such that the list of "sacred relations" (*mahram*) is widely extended.

According to Hossain, she wrote *Sultana's Dream* as a way to pass the time while her husband, Khan Bahadur Syed Sakhawat Hossain, a deputy magistrate, was away on a tour. Her husband was an appreciative audience and encouraged Hossain to read and write in English. Thus, writing *Sultana's Dream* in English was a way of demonstrating her proficiency in the language to her husband. Sakhawat was very impressed by the story and encouraged Hossain to submit the piece to *The Indian Ladies Magazine,* which published the story for the first time in 1905. The story was later published in book form in 1908.

Sultana's Dream, first published in 1905 in a Madras English newspaper, is a witty feminist utopia—a tale of reverse purdah that posits a world in which men are confined indoors and women have taken over the public sphere, ending a war nonviolently and restoring health and beauty to the world.

"The Secluded Ones" is a selection of short sketches, first published in Bengali newspapers, illuminating the cruel and comic realities of life in purdah.

> "A clever and appealing story of reversed purdah (seclusion of women) in Ladyland, where women overpower men through brains rather than brawn. Accompanying this story are selections from "The Secluded Ones" (1928), a factual account of extreme cases of purdah. Commentaries by scholars put the works of the little-known Hossain in a global and historical context. An interesting and informative work for Asian studies and women's studies collections." ***—Library Journal***

UNIT 2

MAHASWETA DEVI

"DRAUPADI" (STORY)

Q.1 Comment on the theme of violence and defiance in the story Draupadi.

Or

Write character sketch of Draupadi.

Ans. Draupadi is a short story of around 20 pages originally written in Bengali by Mahasweta Devi. It was anthologised in the collection, Breast Stories, translated to English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Devi situates her story against the Naxalite movement (19;67-71), the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971) of West Bengal and the ancient Hindu epic of Mahabharata, engaging with the complex politics of Bengali identity and Indian nationhood. The tribal uprising against wealthy landlords brought upon the fury of the government which led to Operation Bakuli that sought to kill the so-called tribal rebels.

Draupadi is a story about Dopdi Mehjen, a woman who belongs to the Santhal tribe of West Bengal. She is a Robin Hood-like figure who with her husband, Dhulna, murders wealthy landlords and usurp their wells, which is the

primary source of water for the village. The government attempts to subjugate these tribal rebel groups through many means: kidnapping, murder, rape. Dopdi is captured by Officer Senanayak who instructs the army officers to rape her to extract information about the rebel uprising.

Ironically, the same officers who violated her body, insist that she covers up once she is 'done with'. Intransigently, Dopdi rips off her clothes and walks towards officer Senanayak, "…naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts. Two wounds". Senanayak is shocked by her defiance as she stands before him "with her hand on her hip" as "the object of [his] search" and exclaims, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed."

In both, the case of Durga and Draupadi, what happens to their body is a result of patriarchal voices which denies them agency.

The story is stripped away from the Mahabharata's grand narrative and royal attributes and situated in Champabhumi, a village in West Bengal. The 'cheelharan' of Draupadi is reconstructed in Devi's story, subverting the narrative where Draupadi is rescued by a man, Lord Krishna. Instead, in Devi's narrative, Dopdi is not rescued, yet she continues to exercise her agency by refusing to be a victim, leaving the armed men "terribly afraid".

Dopdi is a woman of strong mind and will as she defied the shame associated with rape and sexual abuse, which is extremely relevant to India today. Especially in the onset of the #MeToo movement where many brave women came forward with their stories.

Dopdi is… what Draupadi — written into the patriarchal and authoritative sacred text as proof of male power — could not be.

This paper discusses briefly the structures of power exercised by the heroic woman character,Draupadi in the epic *Mahabharata* and in Mahasweta Devis story "Draupadi" translated byGayatri Chakravorty.
The first part is written in the form of a dossier: Dopdi Mejhen is twenty-seven and wanted by police. Her husband was Dulna Majhi, now deceased. Information is wanted about this "*most notorious* female." She and her husband were the main culprits in murdering Surja Sahu and his

sons, and managed to escape capture by pretending to be dead during Operation Bakuli, an attack by Special Forces. The two went underground and stories of the “hair-raising details” of the “black-skinned couple” and other rebels circulated.
Captain Arjan Singh is frustrated and feels like Dopdi has exacerbated his diabetes. He has so “irrational a dread of black-skinned people that whenever he saw a black person in a ballbag, he swooned, saying ‘they’re killing me,’ and drank and passed a lot of water.”

He meets with Mr. Senanayak, a Bengali specialist in combat and extreme Left politics. He “knows the activities and capacities of the opposition better than they themselves do.” He touts the value of the Army Handbook, which says all guerilla fighters must be eradicated. Dopdi and Dulna are this type of fighter. Senanayak should not be trifled with; he respects the opposition, though he is trying to get rid of them.

After escaping from Bakuli, Dopdi and Dulna worked at the houses of landowners to inform the killers of everything about the targets. Dulna was killed when soldiers infiltrated the forest and shot him dead. As he was dying he yelled out “Ma-ho,” a phrase which flummoxed the Department of Defense. The soldiers left his body as bait and hoped that someone would come claim him and they could shoot them, but no one did.

The search for Dopdi now continues. Initially the fugitives were easy to catch, but now they are not. There is not much information about what is happening, about how many there are, how many were killed, if it is worth the expense of keeping the battalion in the forest. It is also unclear how Dopdi fits in. Thus, the Operation Jharkhani Forest cannot stop.

Dopdi is walking through the forest. She hears her name and does not respond; she never does, as she is not going by that name now. She was talking to Mushai’s wife earlier, who suggested she run away. Dopdi replied that she has run away so many times, but promised that she will reveal no one’s name. She knows what she would do if she is tortured, which is to bite off her own tongue.

She is walking and hears “Dopdi!” again, but she is Upi Mejhen now. Her mind flicks through who it might be. Maybe it is someone from Bakuli, as only Mushai and his wife know her real name here.

She thinks of Operation Bakuli and the corrupt Surja Sahu. His house was surrounded at night and the rebels tied him up and he loosed his bowels. Dulna wanted the first blow because his “great grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labor to repay that debt.” Dopdi said she would be next and would pull out his eyes because “His mouth watered when he looked at me.” Then messages came that the army was near. There was burning, guns, flame throwers, men women and children dying, Dulna and Dopdi crawling on their stomachs to escape. They made it to Bhupati and Tapa’s house. It was decided they would work around the forest belt. Dulna told Dopdi it would mean they would not have family and children, but they could wipe out landowners, moneylenders, and policeman someday.

Dopdi keeps walking. She only wants to make it to the forest. It will be time to change hideouts soon. She thinks with pride of her forefathers, the “pure unadulterated black blood of Champabhumi.”

It is two miles to the camp. The footsteps maintain their distance but are still following her. She decides she will not try to lose him or outrun him in the forest, this “fucking jackal of a cop, deadly afraid of death.” She cannot go to the hideout as she has been compromised, but it will be clear to her where Arijit has moved it. Dopdi decides to lead the cop to the burning ghat.

But a moment later lumps of rock stand up and yell out to apprehend Dopdi. Senanayak is elated, for clearly he still knows the enemy well. Yet Dopdi could not trick him, which is bothersome. Dopdi raises her arms and her face to the sky and ululates “with the force of her entire being” and “the echo of the call travels far.”

She is apprehended at 6:53pm and taken to the camp. Senayayak tells his men to “make,” or rape, her. She wakes from a daze and feels her arms and legs tied to posts. She has no gag but is incredibly thirsty. Her vagina is bleeding and her bottom and waist are sticky. She does not know how many men came. Her breasts are raw and her nipples torn. She hopes for a moment that she’s been left for the foxes to devour but she hears more men. They come to her and rape her again.

Morning comes and she is brought to the tent and a piece of cloth is thrown over her body. A man comes in and orders her to Burra Sahib’s tent. She stands, and instead of drinking the water brought to her, pours it on the

ground. Instead of wearing the cloth, she tears it with her teeth. The man thinks she has gone crazy and runs for orders.

There is a commotion and Senanayak walks out and is surprised to see Draupadi walking naked towards him with her head held high. The “nervous guards” are behind her. He is about to bark out to ask what this is, but she comes closer with her hands on her hips and laughs that she is Dopdi Mejhen, the object of his search, and he told his men to rape her and they did.

Senanayak asks where her clothes are and the men say she tore them. Draupadi shakes with laughter and in a terrifying voice emanating from her bleeding lips, asks what the use of clothes is—they can strip her, but they cannot clothe her again. She spits a bloody gob on his shirt and says “There isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, *counter* me—come on, *counter* me—?”
She pushes her “mangled breasts” on Senanayak and “for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target,* terribly afraid.”

UNIT 3

SHASHI DESHPANDE

THAT LONG SILENCE

Q.1 Comment on the plot construction of That Long Silence.

Or

Write the character sketch of Jaya.

Or

What is the main theme of That Long Silence?

Ans. "That Long Silence" is one of the most well-known novels of **Shashi Deshpande**. It was published in 1988. It won her high praise in literary circles and the highest literary recognition in India- the Sahitya Akademi Award. It is a novel about domesticity.

Summary of That Long Silence

The novel is the story of the marital life of Jaya and Mohan. They come from a very ordinary non-urban middle-class background. Jaya belonged to a middle-class family in North-West India, that was not ready to give equal status to men and women. She got married despite her family's disapproval. Jaya is living in Bombay with her

husband Mohan. They have two teenage children – Rahul and Rati. Monan is an engineer in a steel plant. He is charged with taking bribes and suspended from his job.

The whole world of Jaya and Mohan comes crashing as a palace of cards. Mohan faces great humiliation. He becomes extremely agitated and irritable. He expects his wife should come out openly in support of him. He would like to be seen as a victim of the jealousy of his colleagues and superiors.

Economic and Social Difficulties

In addition to this, the family have to face economic and social difficulties. They have to leave the comfortable churchgate flat. The family would have been shelterless if Jaya's elder brother Dinakar had not come to their rescue. He offered the family a flat at Dadar. Dadar was a lower middle-class locality. It had less accommodation. There everybody had come to know of Mohan's being disgraced in service. All this made him extremely short-tempered.

Jaya's Situation

Jaya felt greatly worried about whatever had happened. On the one hand, she was taught by her conventional Hindu upbringing to stand by her husband come what may. On the other hand, her moral consciousness made her suspect that Mohan had been guilty of wrongdoing. Therefore, Jaya could not come out in total support of her husband. She was in an acute dilemma. It made her reserved and quiet. She became just a passive spectator.

Rahul and Rati

What Jaya and Mohan were going through could not be kept secret from their children – Rahul and Rati. Rati was sociable. She could make friends easily and took an interest in the activities outside the four walls of the house. But Rahul was an introvert. He was moody. His parents were greatly worried about how he would react to the changed situation. When Mohan proposed that a tutor should be engaged to help the children work on their studies, Rahul flatly refused to have to tutor.

Fortunately, their neighbours – Ashoka and Rupa offered to take Rahul and Rati along with them to the South. They were going there during their vacation with their children who were of the same age as Rahul and Rati. Thus Jaya could save her children from the depressing experience at home.

Thoughts of Jaya

Jaya is often lost in thinking of the past. She recalls the hard life of her grandmother, who used to live after her widowhood. She also thinks of **Kusum**, the niece of **Vanita Mami** who had been deserted by her husband. She was living a miserable half-crazy existence. Everybody ridiculed her. Even her children did not like to be with her. Jaya also thinks of the whole **family of the Nairs** who committed suicide because of economic difficulties.

Jaya also recalls the plight of her mother-in-law who was ill-treated by her father-in-law. Even Mohan's sister who told Jaya of her mother's suffering, met a tragic death. Both these women – Mohan's mother and sister died in silence. Thus, Jaya is fully aware of the subjugated status of women in society.

Separation

Jaya comes across her younger brother, Ravi, in the market. He tells her that He has not been on good terms with his wife, Asha. He asks Jaya to help him to patch up the differences between him and his wife. In case of failure, he has made up his mind to divorce her. He also claims that he has sources to help Mohan through his friends. When Jaya refers to Mohan, he becomes suspicious. He asks Jaya again and again about it, believing that Jaya must have talked about his problems to Ravi. But Jaya bursts out in hysterical laughter at the absurdity of the whole situation.

Mohan is taken aback. He feels that Jaya is ridiculing him. Jaya tries to make him understand that she is laughing at the whole ridiculous situation. But Mohan is not convinced. Mohan feels humiliated. He gets up and leaves the flat, threatening that he will never return to her.

Jaya is at her wit's end. She is terror-stricken. She cannot realize an existence independent of her husband. She feels that it is the end of the road for her. She goes to her churchgate flat. There the surroundings remind her of the happy days she had spent there as a housewife. It is here that she receives a phone call from Rupa. She tells Jaya that she is back along with her husband and children from the South.

Jaya's children – Rahul and Rati had also come along with them. But soon after their return, Rahul has disappeared somewhere. This puts Jaya into a panic. She just does not know what to do. She is in a delirium. Her neighbours are greatly alarmed at her condition. When Jaya is offered a glass of water, she starts screaming that there are dead ants in it. After that **Jaya** gets the information that Rahul is at Saptagiri and

that he would soon return to her. This gives some solace to the mind of the mother and the wife. She leaves for **Dadar** in a highly agitated frame of mind.

When Jaya reaches her Dadar flat, she is in an agitated mood. One of her neighbours **Mukta**, tries her best to put Jaya at her ease. She takes Mukta in her confidence. She tells her that Mohan has left her in great anger and he may not come back. Mukt.. sympathises with her. She also wonders what Jaya would do if **Mohan** fails to return. Jaya herself does not know the answer to this crucial question.

Contemplative Mood of Jaya

After a while, Rahul returns together with his uncle – Mohan's younger brother, Vasant. Jaya assures him that she has heard from Mohan who had gone out a short while ago. But he now plans to be back soon. After that, everything will be alright. Jaya is in a contemplative mood. She recalls an evening spent in a park. There she saw a villainous man staring at her. She also recalls again the unfortunate Nair family which committed suicide by common agreement.

Open Ending

The novel ends on a rather tentative note. The lay reader is wondering whether Mohan would be packed and everything would be alright. Even if he returns, whether things would be normal again. The reader is left wondering what the life of the characters concerned would be like when they get together again.

Ques. 2 **Critically analyze the writing style of Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence*. How does her narrative technique enhance the themes and psychological depth of the novel?**

Answer:

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is one of India's most celebrated contemporary novelists, particularly known for her **sensitive portrayal of women's inner lives and social identities**. Her novel *That Long Silence* (1988) is a **psychological exploration of a woman's struggle with silence, identity, and patriarchy**, told through the voice of the protagonist, Jaya. Deshpande's **writing style in this novel is introspective, minimalist, and layered with psychological nuance**.

Rather than focusing on external drama or plot twists, Deshpande's narrative centers on **internal conflict**, **memory**, and **emotional reality**. Her **language is simple**, yet **emotionally intense**. This writing style aligns perfectly with the **themes of suppression, voicelessness, and the struggle for self-definition** that dominate the novel.

1. First-Person Narrative and Confessional Tone

One of the most distinctive features of Deshpande's writing style in *That Long Silence* is her use of the **first-person narrative voice**. The entire story is told through the **interior monologue of Jaya**, a middle-class, educated Indian woman who is facing a personal and marital crisis. This narrative technique creates an **intimate, confessional tone**, allowing readers direct access to the **private thoughts, fears, and memories** of the protagonist.

- The first-person voice creates **authenticity and immediacy**, making the reader feel like a confidant.
- The style is reminiscent of **a diary or journal**, full of pauses, repetitions, and self-questioning.

This **introspective style** allows Deshpande to delve into **the unspoken anxieties of women**, their suppressed desires, and the long silence they endure in a patriarchal society.

2. Stream of Consciousness and Fragmented Narrative

Deshpande adopts a **stream-of-consciousness technique**, where Jaya's thoughts flow in an **associative, non-linear manner**. Instead of following a traditional chronological plot, the novel moves **back and forth in time**, from past memories to present reflections.

- The narrative is often **fragmented**, shifting from one thought or incident to another with minimal transitions.
- This style mirrors the **disjointed mental state of Jaya**, who is trying to piece together her life and identity.

By using this **modernist technique**, Deshpande emphasizes that **a woman's reality is often not coherent or unified**, but made up of **broken memories, internalized guilt, and repressed feelings**.

3. Minimalist Language and Everyday Speech

Deshpande's language is deliberately **simple, sparse, and unadorned**. She avoids ornamental language and instead uses **plain prose** that reflects **ordinary Indian middle-class life**.

- The diction is conversational, often mimicking the **natural rhythms of thought and speech**.
- The minimalist style suits the novel's themes—**silence, invisibility, and emotional restraint**.

This **realism in language** helps convey the **banality of domestic oppression**, the quiet suffering that doesn't make headlines but defines many women's lives. It also allows the **psychological depth** of the novel to emerge through **subtle shifts in tone, hesitation, and silence**.

4. Use of Silence as a Stylistic and Thematic Device

Silence is not just a theme—it is also a **stylistic device** in the novel. Deshpande uses **pauses, ellipses, and unfinished thoughts** to reflect Jaya's inner silence.

- There are **spaces between words and thoughts**, signaling things that are felt but not said.
- The prose often reflects moments of **emotional paralysis**, where Jaya cannot find the words to express herself.

These silences emphasize the **psychological violence of patriarchy**, where a woman learns to be quiet, to adapt, and to erase her own voice. The **long silence** is not just external—it is internalized and shapes Jaya's way of speaking, thinking, and writing.

5. Symbolism and Subtle Imagery

While Deshpande does not rely heavily on elaborate metaphor, she uses **small, everyday symbols** to convey deeper meanings:

- The **house** becomes a symbol of confinement and emotional imprisonment.
- The **mirror** is often used to reflect Jaya's internal conflict and her split between external role and internal identity.
- Domestic objects—like utensils, sarees, and furniture—are **infused with emotional weight**, symbolizing the **burden of domesticity**.

Her imagery is often **understated**, yet rich in meaning. It reflects the **inner world of women**, where the domestic space becomes the **stage of psychological drama**.

6. Juxtaposition of Memory and Reality

Deshpande constantly shifts between **Jaya's present crisis** and **her memories of childhood, marriage, and personal choices**. This juxtaposition creates a layered narrative, where **past experiences are shown to shape present behavior**.

- Memories are not told as full flashbacks but **interrupted fragments**.
- Deshpande uses this stylistic approach to show how **the past haunts the present**, especially for women who have been trained to forget their desires.

By showing how Jaya's present silence is a result of years of small compromises and suppressions, Deshpande creates a **multi-dimensional character study**, not just a social commentary.

7. Feminist Undertone Without Rhetoric

Deshpande's style avoids **direct feminist slogans or political rhetoric**, but her prose has a **deeply feminist consciousness**. She conveys women's oppression through **realistic scenarios, personal reflections, and psychological truth** rather than polemics.

- The style is **quiet, subtle, and analytical**, just like the protagonist.
- There is no dramatic rebellion, but a **gradual awakening** of self-awareness.

This **measured tone** is what makes the novel so powerful. It reflects the reality that for many women, empowerment comes not from revolution, but from **recognizing and reclaiming their own voice**.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's writing style in *That Long Silence* is a brilliant fusion of **realism, introspection, psychological depth, and minimalist technique**. Through her use of **first-person narrative, stream-of-consciousness, fragmented structure, and symbolic silence**, Deshpande offers a powerful portrayal of a woman's journey from repression to self-awareness.

Her language is simple, but her insights are profound. The style itself becomes a reflection of the novel's central concerns: the **invisibility of women's suffering**, the **quiet violence of domestic life**, and the **long silence that can either destroy or transform**. In telling Jaya's story in such an honest and intimate voice, Deshpande creates a new space in Indian English fiction—one where **the personal is deeply political**, and **silence is both a prison and a path to liberation**.

UNIT 4

MEENA KANDASAMY

Q.1 Write the characteristics of Meena Kandasamy as a poet.

Ans. Kandasamy was born in 1984 in Chennai, India, the daughter of a mixed-caste Tamil marriage. Her parents' involvement in the anti-caste struggle led Meena to work alongside the Dalit movement, a religious as well as socio-political movement which challenges the caste system in India and promotes the rights of the Dalits, i.e. the people belonging to the lowest caste, the "untouchables". Thus, in her late teens (2002), she was the editor of The Dalit, a bimonthly "that provided a platform to record atrocities, condemn oppressive hierarchies and document the forgotten heritage."

- Her debut collection of poems, Touch (2006) was themed around caste and untouchability, and her second collection, Ms Militancy (2010) was an explosive, feminist reclaiming of Tamil and Hindu myths. When interviewed on her poetic works Kandasamy said "My poetry is naked, my poetry is in tears, my poetry screams in anger, my poetry writhes in pain. My poetry smells of blood, my poetry salutes sacrifice. My poetry speaks like my people, my poetry speaks for my people."
- In 2011, she was married briefly – four months – to a man who subjected her to physical and psychological violence and in 2013 she met her current partner, with whom she moved to the UK in 2016. They currently live in East London with their two sons.
- Her critically acclaimed first novel, The Gypsy Goddess (2014) is a stunning and deeply faithful account of the murder of 44 low-caste labourers and their families in a Tamil village in 1968. The workers,

striking for better pay and conditions, were locked in a hut and burned alive. It is a terrible shocking story, framed by a humorous narrator who talks directly to us of people fighting for justice. 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, while her third novel, Exquisite Cadavers (2019) is a work of experimental fiction in which the writer dissects her own creative process revealing how her ideas are worked into fiction.

- Kandasamy works closely with issues of caste and gender and how society puts people into stereotypical roles on the basis of these categories. Let's take a closer look at When I Hit You, the novel in which she lifts the veil on the silence that surrounds the burning issue of domestic violence and marital rape in modern India. The author made it clear that it is not a memoir but a representation of her own story which anonymises the narrator in order to universalise the experience, transforming it into "a call-to-action to believe and support all women".
- When this powerful novel opens the unnamed protagonist has already escaped from her abusive husband so the suspense is not whether she'll survive but whether she'll be allowed to tell her own story. The woman's mother has been telling the story to relatives, neighbours, and circles of friends, focusing on the physical signs of her daughter's abuse and escape: "That criminal had cut my daughter's hair short, and it was in-fes-ted" while "Her heels were cracked and her soles were 25 shades darker than the rest of her." But lest those four harrowing months of her life be whittled down to an anecdote, the narrator realizes that she can be the only one to tell us what happened.
- Her story leads us through her emotional journey, from confident college student then published writer to *"a woman whom no one wants to look at or, more accurately, whom no one even sees"*. The journey towards that assertion is a tough one which begins with a stripping of the narrator's autonomy after her marriage to a university lecturer, Marxist and one-time revolutionary in south India, an educated cultured brute who uses communist ideas "as a cover for his own sadism".
- When she moves with him to an unfamiliar city, an assault on her tongue, mind and body begins. The language barrier ensures that in public she can only speak words of wifely domesticity, shopping for

vegetables or cleaning products. Her husband manipulates her into the surrender of her email accounts and the suspension of her Facebook page through emotional and psychological blackmail, for example by singeing himself until she gives in ("If you love me, this is the quickest way you will make up your mind.")

- Beatings and rapes follow, with everyday middle-class implements weaponised: the hose of the washing machine, the power cord for her laptop. Shame, pride and a society in which everyone, from parents to police, expects a woman to put up and shut up force the realisation that, if she wants to come out of it alive, only she can save herself.
- However this is not just a story of survival. It is one of self-preservation, and what makes the novel unique is that even as she is beaten down the narrator reflects that every moment of her life has narrative potential and writing can be her salvation. Thus the novel becomes a meditation on the art of writing about desire, abuse and trauma and we are introduced into a "play-within-the-novel": "Lights, camera, action. Rolling, rolling, role-playing". The narrator speaks of her life as if she were directing a play and acting her own role in it at the same time: "And cut! I am the wife playing the role of an actress playing out the role of a dutiful wife watching my husband pretend to be the hero of the everyday." In this double role of director/actor she does not only manage to distance herself from the hell she is experiencing but she also succeeds in regaining control of her life, at first virtually and only partially, through the "play" she makes up ("And what is a writer, if not the one who gets to shape the narrative, to have the last word?") but later on fully and decisively, when she exceeds her written brief and shows her husband up for what he is: "Don't tell me how brave you are. A brave man doesn't run. A brave man doesn't rape and hit his wife. You, my husband, are not a brave man."
- Thoroughly heartbreaking and often characterised by stunning changes of tone, Kandasamy's writing is nevertheless also funny, tender and lyrical, usually simultaneously. She writes with poetic intensity making extensive use of stylistic devices such as repetition which create a pounding, hammering rhythm: the last chapter is a case in point, adding a tinge of grandiosity and melodrama to the ending of the story which underlines who "the woman sitting down to write her story" truly is, a strong resilient indomitable person. "I am the woman…" is repeated over 35 times

and each time we are offered a different aspect of this woman who, despite the devastating experience, is "the woman who still believes, broken-heartedly in love".

- Where does Kandasamy fit into contemporary literature? Her mixed-caste upbringing and her experiences as a Tamil woman in both India and the UK inform all of her work. Notwithstanding her undeniable artistic merits, the act of writing for her can never be separated from her politics. Driven by a desire for social justice she feels compelled to bring to the fore such appalling realities as the fact that "In India a bride is burnt every ninety minutes. The time it takes to fix a quick dinner. The time it takes to do the dishes. The time it takes to wash a load of clothing. The time it takes to commute". Despite having faced threats of violence for her fearless criticism of Indian society she believes that threats "shouldn't dictate what you are going to write or hinder you in any manner". Her work has appeared in eighteen languages giving voice to the voiceless so that they may be listened to.
- Kandasamy's novel **When I Hit You** brings to light the dramatic issue of domestic abuse and of woman's place in contemporary Indian society, confirmed by the 2019 National Family Health Survey which discovered that over 30 percent of women were physically, sexually or emotionally abused by their partners at some point. Find out more about the problem in our world today and create a powerpoint presentation on the topic, connecting it to to the UN Sustainable Development Goals which have to do with gender equality and human rights.

Ques 2 **Discuss the central themes in Meena Kandasamy's poem "Aggression." How does the poem reflect the poet's identity, politics, and resistance through its imagery and tone?**

Answer:

Introduction

Meena Kandasamy, a powerful voice in contemporary Indian English literature, is known for her **fierce feminist and anti-caste stance**. In her poetry, she gives expression to **Dalit identity, gender resistance, and social justice**. Her poem ***"Aggression"*** from the collection *Ms. Militancy* (2010) is an intense, emotionally charged declaration of rebellion, where she reclaims the term "aggression" not as a vice, but as a **necessary survival tool and a political statement**.

The poem explores themes such as **female anger**, **resistance to patriarchy**, **the power of language**, and the **radical rejection of silence and submission**. In doing so, Kandasamy uses **raw imagery, direct language, and an unapologetic tone** to challenge dominant narratives about how women, especially Dalit women, are expected to behave in Indian society.

1. Reclaiming Aggression: Anger as Power

The central theme of the poem is the **redefinition of aggression**. Traditionally, aggression is seen as a **negative trait**, especially for women, who are expected to be docile, soft-spoken, and submissive. Kandasamy challenges this norm by presenting aggression as **strength**, as **self-defense**, and as **a political weapon**.

- The speaker refuses to apologize for being aggressive; instead, she claims it as a **natural and rightful response** to oppression.
- Anger is portrayed not as destructive, but as **transformative**—a source of empowerment and voice.

In this way, the poem connects **personal emotion to political ideology**. Kandasamy suggests that **in a world where women are silenced, to be aggressive is to survive**.

2. Feminist Assertion and Resistance to Patriarchy

The poem can be read as a **feminist manifesto**, challenging the deeply rooted **patriarchal values** that attempt to discipline women through guilt and shame.

- The speaker describes how society trains women to be **obedient and voiceless**.
- She resists the stereotype of the **sacrificing, self-effacing woman**, choosing instead to speak, fight, and express.

Kandasamy critiques the **moral policing of female behavior**, especially within Indian cultural contexts. By doing so, she speaks for all women who are taught that to be good, they must be quiet and enduring. Instead, Kandasamy's speaker chooses to be **noisy, angry, and assertive**.

3. Dalit Identity and Historical Oppression

Although the poem does not overtly mention caste, the **aggression the poet claims** is closely tied to her **Dalit identity**. As a **Dalit woman**, Kandasamy faces **multiple forms of marginalization**—caste-based, gendered, and linguistic.

- The poem implicitly criticizes **Brahminical patriarchy**, which not only oppresses through caste hierarchies but also uses **cultural narratives** to silence Dalit women.
- By refusing to stay quiet or accept her social position, the speaker performs an act of **cultural rebellion**.

In this sense, aggression is not just emotional but **ideological**. It is a reaction to centuries of **oppression, erasure, and exclusion**.

4. Language as a Tool of Liberation

Kandasamy's use of **direct, unornamented, and often violent language** is central to the poem's impact. She refuses to speak politely or hide her anger in metaphor.

- The poem's tone is **bold, confrontational, and unapologetic**.
- Her language is **raw and visceral**, reflecting the **real, lived pain of oppression**.

By choosing such a style, she **reclaims language as a site of power**. In a society where women and Dalits are often denied the right to speak, Kandasamy's speaker takes full ownership of her voice, using it not to beg or explain, but to **declare war** on injustice.

5. Breaking the Culture of Silence

Another important theme is the **rejection of silence**. The poem opens with the speaker refusing to be quiet and ends with her insistence that silence is complicity. This reflects Kandasamy's larger belief that **speaking out is an act of political resistance**.

- Silence has historically been imposed on women and the oppressed as a form of **discipline and fear**.
- The speaker declares that she has had enough of this silence; her **aggression is her answer**.

In this context, aggression is not just speech—it is a **mode of expression**, a **means of survival**, and a **rejection of internalized oppression**.

6. Subversion of Traditional Femininity

The poem aggressively **challenges traditional notions of femininity**—gentle, pure, obedient. Kandasamy's speaker is the opposite: she is loud, angry, and unashamed of it.

- She **destroys the myth** that womanhood is defined by patience and quiet suffering.
- Instead, she embraces **rage, resistance, and rebellion** as her identity.

This is not a passive victim's voice—it is the voice of a woman who **chooses to confront** the structures that try to destroy her. In doing so, Kandasamy turns the **violent expectations placed upon women into weapons** against patriarchy itself.

7. Universality and Individual Assertion

While rooted in her **personal identity**, Kandasamy's poem speaks to a **universal female experience**. Any woman who has been told to be quiet, obedient, or less than, can find herself in the speaker's voice.

- The "aggression" described is personal, but it stands for **generations of suppressed women**.
- In this way, the poem becomes a **collective voice**, not just for Dalit women, but for all women resisting patriarchal and cultural oppression.

Conclusion

Meena Kandasamy's poem *"Aggression"* is a **bold, radical, and unapologetic celebration of female anger** and **resistance to systemic oppression**. Through her unique voice, Kandasamy reclaims aggression as a **moral and political necessity**—a strategy for survival and self-definition in a world that tries to silence women, especially those from marginalized communities.

Her use of **direct language, emotional intensity, and feminist consciousness** makes the poem a powerful statement against patriarchy, casteism, and cultural expectations. *"Aggression"* is not just a poem—it is a **weapon, a battle cry, and a declaration of war** against silence and submission.

In a society where women are taught that silence is strength, Kandasamy turns that idea on its head: **it is aggression—not silence—that leads to freedom**.

Ques 3 Here is a **detailed long answer** (5–6 pages in exam writing) on the **theme of "Inheritance" by Meena Kandasamy**, suitable for university-level English literature exams:

Question: 3 Discuss the major themes in Meena Kandasamy's poem "Inheritance." How does the poem reflect the poet's feminist and anti-caste consciousness?

Answer: Introduction

Meena Kandasamy is a fearless voice in contemporary Indian English poetry, known for her fiery engagement with **Dalit identity, feminism, and social justice**. Her poem ***"Inheritance"*** from the poetry collection *Ms. Militancy* (2010) is a bold reflection on the legacy passed on to a **Dalit woman poet**—not of wealth or tradition, but of **oppression, resistance, and radical anger**.

The poem explores how women like her "inherit" **marginalization, historical trauma, and generational silence**, but also **the strength to resist, reclaim, and redefine** that inheritance. Kandasamy's use of **stark imagery, uncompromising language, and symbolic contrasts** allows her to articulate a **subversive, intersectional perspective** on what it means to be a Dalit woman in India.

1. The Title: Rewriting the Meaning of Inheritance

The title "Inheritance" immediately sets up the theme of **what is passed down across generations**. In traditional literature, inheritance often refers to **wealth, land, family name, or cultural legacy**. But for the speaker in this poem, inheritance has a **darker, more painful meaning**.

- She inherits **poverty, marginalization, silence, and trauma**, not privilege.
- However, she also inherits **resistance, rage, and political consciousness**.

This duality of inheritance becomes the central conflict of the poem. Kandasamy reclaims the idea of inheritance to **critique caste, patriarchy, and traditional Indian values**.

2. Dalit Consciousness and Historical Trauma

Kandasamy's **Dalit identity** plays a powerful role in shaping the theme of this poem. In *"Inheritance"*, she presents the **generational legacy of caste-based oppression**, where **violence, erasure, and humiliation** have been normalized for centuries.

- The speaker inherits **a history of untouchability, forced silence, and social exclusion**.
- The trauma is **not individual**—it is **collective and ancestral**, passed through generations of Dalit lives.

Yet this inheritance is not accepted passively. Instead, the poem becomes a form of **counter-memory**, a **resistance to forgetting**, where the speaker **refuses to be grateful or silent**. In this way, Kandasamy uses poetry as a tool to **write against the violence of history**.

3. Feminist Anger and Rebellion

The poem also reflects a deep **feminist consciousness**, addressing the **double burden** of being **both Dalit and a woman**. Kandasamy critiques the **expectation of silence and submission** placed upon women—especially those from marginalized backgrounds.

- She speaks of **anger as a weapon** that she has inherited from her foremothers, who may not have had the tools to express it.
- The poem expresses a **refusal to conform** to the ideal image of an "obedient daughter" or a "good woman."

This feminist rage is **not irrational or uncontrolled**—it is historically justified, politically informed, and **strategically articulated**. Kandasamy reclaims that rage as a **source of strength**, pushing back against both caste and gender hierarchies.

4. Breaking the Cycle of Silence

"Inheritance" is also about the **power of language**—specifically, the power to **break silence**. The speaker inherits **not just suffering, but the responsibility to speak, to write, and to expose the truth**.

- The poem becomes an act of **reclaiming voice** from centuries of silence.
- It challenges the reader to see that **speech itself is a radical act** for those historically denied it.

In this way, poetry becomes **both weapon and inheritance**. Kandasamy's language is **direct, confrontational, and purposeful**, disrupting traditional poetic forms that value beauty over truth.

5. Identity and Reclamation

"Inheritance" is about **owning one's identity fully**—even the parts scarred by pain, injustice, and history. Instead of disowning her legacy, the speaker **embraces it as fuel for her resistance**.

- Her inheritance includes **the fire to fight**, **the will to write**, and **the clarity to resist**.
- She does not seek assimilation or acceptance but demands **dignity and justice** on her own terms.

This reclamation is **both personal and political**. By owning her past, the speaker **rewrites the future**—not as someone who continues the cycle of oppression, but as someone who **ends it with her voice**.

6. Tone and Style: Raw and Revolutionary

Kandasamy's stylistic choices enhance the thematic power of the poem. The **tone is unapologetic, bold, and sometimes angry**—yet it is never without **control or precision**.

- The language is **simple yet powerful**, designed to **shock, awaken, and confront**.
- There is no space for politeness or subtlety—the **violence of history demands direct confrontation**.

By rejecting lyrical embellishment, Kandasamy writes with the urgency of **survival and resistance**, reflecting the **realities of those who have inherited pain and now turn it into power**.

Conclusion

Meena Kandasamy's *"Inheritance"* is a potent poem that redefines the idea of what it means to **inherit a legacy in a society built on caste and gender oppression**. Through a blend of **Dalit consciousness, feminist rebellion, and political urgency**, Kandasamy transforms the notion of inheritance from a passive reception into an **active rejection of silence and submission**.

The poem powerfully affirms that **even if one inherits pain, that pain can become poetry**, and that poetry itself can become **a form of protest**. By embracing her history without shame, the speaker turns her inherited wounds into weapons of resistance.

Thus, *"Inheritance"* is not just a reflection on the past—it is a **declaration of war against it**, ensuring that the speaker's voice, and those like hers, will never again be silenced.