

## Laughter as Liberation: Humour as Resistance in Indian Feminist Literature

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### Abstract

People think that Indian feminist literature is all about relaxing and laughing in the background of humour; it is an ingenious means that the writers are employing to question the forces of patriarchy, castes and social taboos. It is such a secret weapon in the disguise of comedy. The current paper is a close examination of the utilisation of humour by authors like Shashi Deshpande, Meena Kandasamy, and Bama, in attaining control, silencing challenge, and a breaking of oppressive rules. It is just a matter of reversing the script so that we can witness these authors do something quite daring. Our work will be guided by the feminist theory, Dalit feminism and intersectionality to contend that humour is not just a joke. It is corporeal possession of the agency, and it makes disparagement criticism and makes trauma personal testament. Ultimately, the paper concludes that humour provides the Indian feminism with the distinct method of survival, reclaiming power, and rebelling. Laughter becomes a strong language that keeps us alive and struggling to get a better place.

**Keywords:** *Humour, Feminist Writing, Satire, Indian Literature, Dalit Feminism, Resistance, Intersectionality*

### 1. Introduction: The Politics of Laughter

Traditionally, humour has been used as an instrument of patriarchal authority, or in other words, the women have been the objects of the jokes but rarely the creators. Indian feminist writers purposely change the direction of this: they laugh back. By doing that, they assert their control to interpretative power over the language, identity, and representation. According to Barreca (1991), the humour of women changes the shame into agency, which opens new political possibilities. In the Indian context such laughter is strongly interwoven with the cultural demands of female silence, modesty, and emotional labour which makes the humour act transgressive.

### 2. Theoretical Framework: Feminism, Satire, and Subversion

According to feminist literary theory, humour is an act of critique and a survival methodology of rhetoric, and it is a form of power-altering vulnerability. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Hélène

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Cixous (1976) theorizes laughter as a burst of feminine territory that breaks the linear, logical and male centred language of authority. To Cixous, to laugh is to write the body, thus repossession of sensuality and subversion as writing. This view is related to the ideas of Julia Kristeva about the semiotic chora whereby laughter disrupts the rules of linguistic order by introducing the beats of emotion, irony, and insubordination. Feminist humour is therefore not an aesthetic act but a critical act address of the challenges of symbolic control; it reveals the performative nonsense of patriarchy and transforms it into effective material to parody them. Within the Indian context, this dynamic has some extra dimensions when interpreted in terms of Dalit feminism and intersectionality. The comedy of Bama in her *Sangati* (1994) or Meena Kandasamy in her *When I Hit You* (2017) cannot be considered outside of the hierarchies of caste and classes that define the lives of these two writers. Laughter is not to me some distant, abstract concept, but rather an outgrowth of common tribulations and the common strength that we establish among ourselves. In a way that Rege (2006) would argue, laughter is a language of survival when the silence is used as a weapon to the oppressed. This combination of the satire and social critique also depicts how Dalit and postcolonial feminists redefine resistance. Humour in these texts is a counter-discourse - not to be shut up by patriarchal morality or caste hierarchy. It teases the tyrant and the oppressed are humanized, which turns the commonplace gesture of laughing into an act of self-performance and dignity that is radical.

### **3. Deshpande's Subtle Irony: Domesticity and Cognitive Revolt**

The novel *That Long Silence* (1988) by Shashi Deshpande really strikes a chord with its low-key harsh irony with which it dismantles the entire domestic patriarchy of the middle-income. Deshpande is able to reveal how silence is transformed into such social discipline as through Jaya, the protagonist, Deshpande demonstrates how silence is transformed into such social discipline. By saying, the silence of women has been hailed centuries, Jaya is referring to the silence of women being glorified. Now I understand why, it is so convenient to men then (Deshpande, 1988), it is so like a punch line that becomes a criticism. The comedy, here, is not loud or manic, but a moment of high clarity that suddenly opens the eyes to the self to the oppression. The irony of Jaya is, ironically, disarming, it turns the gaze inside out and makes the character as well as us readers confront the nonsense of gendered obedience.

The home becomes a theatric scene of a mental revolt through that detached irony. Deshpande demonstrates the house as an actual disciplinary institution, rather than a safe haven, by describing the minutiae of the kitchen, bedroom and corridor life. Her sense of humour is subtle

and yet carries such a serious political message, which revolves around belonging to the crowd and going against it. Her characters frequently laugh at themselves to survive, and guilt has become self-conscious. This crafty laugh addresses day-to-day feminist politics, bargaining on the freedom within boundaries. Deshpande, using controlled wit, breaks the patriarchal myth of feminine virtue by showing it to be false, which is aligned to the fact that the personal is political, a concept of feminist second-wave feminism. Her humour is doing all the heavy lifting, in other words, she is reluctant to say the least. It allows us to resist in a peaceful manner to wake up consciousness but not to dismantle things. It is this Indian feminist subtle resistance that does not tip the house over.

#### **4. Kandasamy's Radical Irony and Political Satire**

As compared to Deshpande who makes things sort of serious, Meena Kandasamy snags a gun-blazing militant look to feminine humour. She employs irony as a tool of reclaimed power in her work as a poet in her collection titled *Ms. Militancy* (2010) and as a novelist in her book *When I Hit You* (2017). By her words she says, they say I have sharp tongue. I say, it is the sole weapon that they had not seized, Kandasamy translates linguistic violent into creative energy. Her comedic style is physical, near to rage, but it has a distinct purpose, the transformation of speaking into an act of rebellion. In *When I Hit You*, the witty narration of the protagonist is that he wanted a wife that would remain silent, but I had a voice. That was my crime, -- points out the sex violence of silence. The black dark tragicomic humour of Kandasamy is made by suffering but is firmly opposed to the victimhood.

The institutional complicity of marriage, religion, caste and even language as the sources of structural oppression of women is satirized in the work by Kandasamy. Her feminist laughs sound to me quite corrosive, as they interrupt the generally holy atmosphere into something that feels much more radical and expressive. This humour in the Dalit feminist discourse, which critics such as Rege (2006) and Guru (1995) identify, sees irony used to protest caste-based patriarchy as a corporeal protest. Kandasamy is not merely foaming. His anger is a revitalizing fire that draws decency out of the ridicule. This is a new dimension of his writing, which portrays a new face of feminist resistance that sarcasm and ridicule could turn into survival strategies. Even though Deshpande makes us look deep inside, when Kandasamy encourages us to do so, his comedy becomes a flaming fire that not only burns and purifies us but also raises the bar much higher.

## **5. Bama's Collective Laughter and Dalit Women's Speech**

According to Sangati (1994) of Bama, laughter is not a side note of politeness or a little secret of a joke, but it is a collective earthly and rebellious activity. The narrator is known to say, our women talk sharp. They are telling the truth without fearing it. This line is very powerful as it reveals how Dalit women use speech quite literally as a weapon. To them laughter is not a means of easing the tension, but it is a sound strike that questions the caste system. The women of Bama refuse to have humiliation eating them up-when those who oppress them attempt to bring them down, they yell back at them or laugh to their faces (Bama, 1994). The humorous aspect of this is crude humour whereby it does not allow the oppressor to win and impose emotional authority. Their mutual banter brings violence to narration, narration to memory, and memory to concrete.

Based on Dalit oral tradition, the humour of the Dalits is twofold: both a mode of survival and a mode of resistance, Bama redefines the ways we conceptualize resistance by playing with language. The comedy subverts caste and patriarchy to show that vulnerability and dignity can co-exist. Bama transforms the ordinary discourse into literary content and renders feminist voice relatable, inclusive, and embodied. Her fashion cuts across Crenshaw intersectionality everywhere, caste and gender in the lived experience of Dalit women. Sangati laughs are a museum of perseverance it is a reminder that the absence of something does not mean that there is no joy, and that is a political act. Elite feminisms tend to be more inclined towards silence or stoicism, whereas Bama allows women to scream the truth, make fun, mock, and unite. Laughing is not about asking permission, it is requirement.

## **7. Conclusion**

Humour is an element of all Indian feminist literature that I have ever read since it is this weirdly effective combination of resistance, feeling, rhetoric, and politics. Deshpande offers a low-key irony, Kandasamy unleashes blazing satire, and Bama appeals to the collective action-everybody is employing humour as asserting agency. It is essentially a revolt against the silence, shame, and erasure beloved by the system.

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