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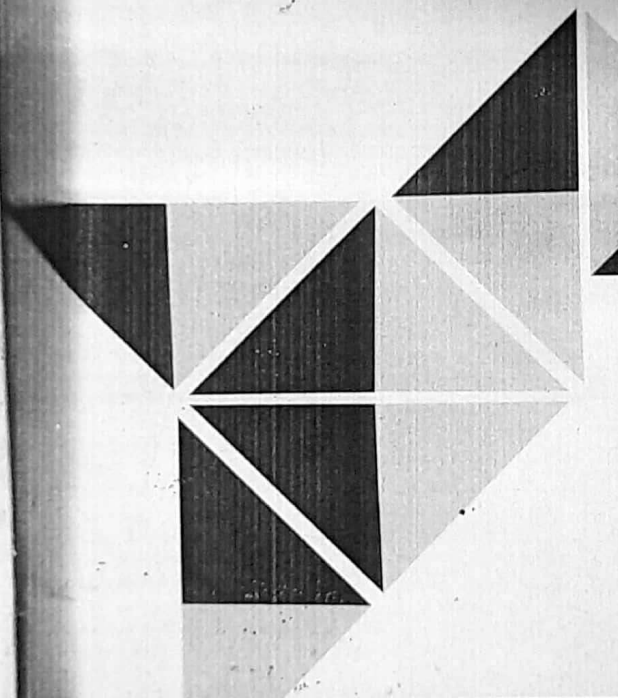
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'This Poem Jungles the Culture':
Examining Strategies of
Remythification in Meena
Kandasamy's *M/s Militancy*

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Abstract

The English word 'myth' derived from the Greek 'mythos', traces its origins to the Greek root 'mu' meaning 'to make a sound with the mouth'. Mythology is, in most cultures, accorded the status of the Word and God, and is essentially looked upon as a complex of stories that are sacred and integral to human existence or which, as Allen W. Watts states, "for various reasons human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life." Myths, however, are not as transparent and innocuous as they might seem, for as Roland Barthes points out, their very principle involves a transformation of history into nature so that they effortlessly make a certain ideological position appear not as right or wrong but as simply natural. A critical engagement with mythology, therefore, inevitably provokes certain questions: Why, how and by whom are mythical stories scripted? Whose culture do these myths propagate? Whose values do they uphold? Within the dictates of a patriarchal culture, it cannot be denied that myth-making becomes essentially the business and privilege of the dominant group whereby it orders, selects, remembers, perpetuates and forgets material to construct and create stories useful for maintaining its own cultural superiority and social status quo. In such a scenario, the re-reading and feminization of mythological material helps in the opening up of a fertile dialogic space – both cultural and epistemological, where narratives long held in place by hierarchical

assumptions are loosened and recast from women's perspectives to reveal alternative truths. The present paper attempts to read the strategies of remythification employed by the Dalit feminist activist Meena Kandasamy in her second collection of poems, *M/s Militancy* and seeks to read her writings as a literary attempt at inserting a feminist subjectivity into the official historical and cultural narratives of the past and present.

Keywords: myth, women, remythification, sexuality, rewriting, feminist.

The writing of Meena Kandasamy comes across to one as a dense and complex intersection of several subjectivities and ideological standpoints. Tamil, feminist and Dalit all at once, her oeuvre exemplifies a radical and consistent attempt not only at powerfully writing subaltern agency and heroism into the lopsided cultural discourse of mainstream society but of relentlessly unpacking its most cherished religious and political myths. A linguist by academic training, Kandasamy evinces a keen awareness of the multi-layeredness of language, its rich connotative semantic potentialities, fractures, elisions and discrepancies, and exploits such understanding skillfully in the interests of both poetry and politics. Her second volume of poetry *Ms Militancy* (2010) is a composite of forty poems that succinctly stand witness to the aptness of the collection's title, for in offering for the reader's inspection intricately woven linguistic arguments that challenge and deeply unsettle the epistemological foundations of canonical cultural narratives, the volume makes a powerfully militant intervention in the so-called sacred texts of patriarchal history, ideologically performing what Kandasamy in a later piece 'This Poem will Provoke You' (2015) calls the 'jungling of culture'. Her politically-engaged poetry, in re-situating the vital mythological stories of a patriarchal Hindu culture through bold, feminist re-interpretations, and in imaginatively and innovatively reading the gaps and silences within their oppressively established scripts, makes a strong claim for the primacy of sexual assertion in women and for the acceptance of sexually transgressive rather than chaste and submissive women as heroic in the predominantly male preserve of heroic mythology.

Kandasamy's cherished method throughout this volume and in her literary oeuvre in general, is a playful, deconstructive attack on religious mythology. "It is just that I struggle with any story that has stayed the