

Deepfake as a social mirror

FIELDWORK AS A SEX OBJECT

By Meena Kandasamy,
HarperCollins, ₹599

Meena Kandasamy strips every variant of the 'performative progressive' naked in this book. With surgical wit and a disturbingly honest eye, she drags into the open everything usually swept beneath the carpet of decency, self-righteousness and political correctness. *Fieldwork as a Sex Object* not only exposes the misogynistic trolls army but it also, equally if not more, turns its gaze towards the hypocrisies, vanities and moral performances that animate supposedly enlightened spaces. Every page spits on the hollowness of woke culture, exposing the distance between sharp political language and blunt political ethics.

At the centre of this ruthless excavation is Amrita (Amy) Chaturvedi, a posh, Brahmin student activist-communist living in London. When a deepfake sex tape of Amy goes viral, the internet sets her ablaze.

What follows is not simply a story about digital misogyny but a society that clutches onto misogyny with its bare claws as if it were mythology. The novel reveals an unadulterated portrayal of Andrew Tate-style 'incels', culture warriors masquerading as guardians of tradition, and self-appointed moral custodians who derive pleasure from a woman's public humiliation. Yet Kandasamy's greatest achievement lies in showing that the violence of the deepfake does not stem from the sex tape itself but from the countless people believing it and customarily celebrating the fall of the 'evil woman'.

What begins as a deepfake scandal soon unfolds, parallelly, into every vocal, opinionated feminist's worst nightmare. Kandasamy captures the suffocating logic of a post-truth world where evidence is irrelevant, outrage is currency, and fakes travel faster than reality as long as it is serving the dominant propaganda. Technology, then, merely amplifies prejudices that already exist; a woman's reputation can be destroyed by deepfake so long as it satisfies an existing desire to punish her. The result is a disturbing portrait of digital dystopianism, one that feels less like fiction and more like a terrifying dispatch from the present.



The novel is equally fearless in form. Genre-defying and structurally restless, it feels less like reading a story than living inside Amy's head. In place of neat chapters are sprawling thought-worlds — jittery, vulnerable, raw and often painfully honest. The narrative moves through anxiety, memory, desire and self-doubt with an almost breathless urgency, mirroring the chaos of a life unravelling in real time.

And the result? An uncomfortable, almost imposed intimacy.

Kandasamy does not invite readers to observe Amy from a safe distance; she traps us within her consciousness, forcing us to inhabit every contradiction, insecurity and moments of self-sabotage. At times, the proximity is claustrophobic. Amy is neither an uncomplicated victim nor an entirely reliable narrator, and the novel refuses to smooth over her flaws for the reader's comfort. What makes this experiment even more compelling is that Kandasamy herself enters the novel as a character, collapsing the distance between author and text, fiction and commentary.

Fieldwork as a Sex Object is not an easy book to read, nor does Kandasamy intend it to be. It unsettles, rage baits and infuriates far more than fiction is usually allowed to. Yet, that is precisely its power and what sets it apart. Long after the final page, what hits and keeps hitting is not the deepfake itself but the rage-inducing recognition of a society that made it possible, all of us who made it possible. The right-wing trolls, the moral performances masquerading as politics, the collective appetite for a woman's public undoing — all of this is implicated in Kandasamy's indictment. In her hands, the deepfake becomes more than a technological threat. It becomes a damn mirror.

Anjali Chauhan