

# Self-Assertion and Gendered Violence in When I Hit You: A Feminist Reading.

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**Abstract**—This paper explores the topics of gendered violence and self-assertion by analyzing Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* via a feminist lens. The painful experience of a young, educated woman stuck in an abusive marriage characterized by physical assault, sexual coercion, emotional brutality, and intellectual suppression is depicted in the novel. The story, which is set against the backdrop of a patriarchal Indian society, shows how marriage may turn into a place of dominance where a woman's autonomy, voice, and bodily integrity are routinely abused. This study contends that the protagonist's writing acts as a kind of self-assertion, allowing her to reclaim subjectivity, oppose silence, and reveal the patriarchal systems that uphold domestic abuse. The protagonist turns personal anguish into a political testament through memory, narration, and resistance. The study also emphasizes how Kandasamy's disjointed narrative style both affirms the possibilities of resistance and survival while reflecting the trauma of violence. In the end, the book is both a powerful feminist literature that emphasizes women's agency in the face of patriarchal oppression and a testament to abuse.

**Index Terms**—domestic abuse, feminist reading, gendered violence, patriarchy, self-assertion, women's agency.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In patriarchal society, where women's bodies, voices, and choices are frequently governed by both visible and invisible forms of authority, gendered violence continues to be one of the most pervasive kinds of oppression. Such violence is commonly depicted in literature as psychological dominance, emotional manipulation, denial of autonomy, and physical abuse. Through the lives of a young lady ensnared in an abusive marriage, Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit*

*You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* provides a troubling yet compelling depiction of domestic violence. The book reveals how marriage and intimacy, which are frequently romanticized as places of safety and comfort, can instead turn into places of silence, fear, and coercion.

The protagonist is not just a victim of violence; she is also a woman fighting to maintain her identity and voice in the face of systematic dominance; her education, creativity, and intellectual independence become a threat to her husband, whose authoritarian masculinity depends on control and obedience. Through this conflict, the novel reveals how gendered violence functions not only through physical assault but also through the destruction of selfhood. Kandasamy's narrative is deeply rooted in feminist concerns, particularly the relationship between patriarchy and the suppression of female agency. In addition to being a victim of assault, the protagonist is a woman battling systematic dominance to maintain her identity and voice. Her spouse, whose authoritarian masculinity relies on compliance and control, finds her education, inventiveness, and intellectual independence to be dangerous. Through this confrontation, the book illustrates how gendered violence operates through both the disintegration of selfhood and physical attack.

A feminist interpretation of the text makes it possible to see self-assertion as a necessary reaction to oppression. The protagonist overcomes the silence enforced on abused women by choosing to write about her experience. She can reclaim her subjectivity, record violence, and turn personal suffering into public witness through writing. In this way, self-assertion becomes a political act that challenges

patriarchal power rather than just a form of personal disobedience. Thus, this essay examines the relationship between gendered violence and women's self-assertion in *When I Hit You*. It looks at how domestic abuse is portrayed in the book, how patriarchy affects people psychologically, and how narrative may be a tool of resistance. The study contends that Kandasamy's book is both a celebration of female agency and a condemnation of patriarchal violence by emphasizing the protagonist's struggle to talk, write, and survive.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Her novel is a powerful analysis of 'modern' marriage through the art of fiction. An unnamed narrator takes us into her world of a misogynist husband; a father embarrassed by the shame that a possible divorce would bring, and a mother who tells her this is how things are, to be silent and to accept the situation because the first year of marriage is always hard; a mother who makes a "spectacle" of the narrator's embarrassment and advises her that time will pass and all her troubles will be forgotten. A crucial aspect this book brings out is the way violence perpetuates in a seemingly "modern", "love" marriage. We are always told when we question the patriarchy of traditional marriages that "modern marriages are not like that", "love marriages are not like that"- Kandasamy breaks this myth. (Tanu Kashyap 68)

Meena Kandasamy's autobiographical novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* offers a powerful literary representation of marital rape and domestic abuse. The novel presents an insider's account of a woman trapped in an abusive marriage, where violence is justified in the name of love, discipline, and marital duty. Kandasamy exposes how intellectual authority, masculinity, and cultural power operate together to legitimize abuse. The husband in the novel is not merely an individual offender but a representative of patriarchal ideology that controls, disciplines, and violates the female body. (Keerthana 9)

The plot of the novel under study deals with the psychological sufferings of a woman writer who falls in love with a college professor and marries him with many dreams of building a better world together. However, all her dreams are shattered when she learns about the reality of her married life. The story begins

with the narration of protagonist mother who tells about her daughter's story of escaping marriage in a sugar-coated version censored. It gives the writer an urge to redefine her story through her pen. (Meetal Hardeniya 1316)

This paper *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* has garnered much scholarly interest due to its potent depiction of feminist resistance, the politics of speech, and domestic violence. In order to comprehend how the story highlights women's agency and self-respect while exposing patriarchal oppression, critics typically analyze the text using feminist and postcolonial frameworks. This analysis of the literature examines significant critical viewpoints that guide the current investigation of women's freedom and self-respect in Kandasamy's story.

The novel's feminist portrayal of domestic abuse is the main topic of this paper. Kandasamy's story, according to many critics, illustrates how patriarchal power functions in the private sphere of marriage. The violent relationship of the protagonist serves as an example of how physical aggression, intellectual repression, and emotional manipulation work together to control women's lives. The book reveals the covert systems of gendered violence that are frequently accepted in patriarchal countries through this portrayal. These studies demonstrate how the text turns the individual's experience of abuse into a political indictment of patriarchal ideology.

The significance of narrative voice and storytelling as resistance is another significant field of study. The book is written in a disjointed and introspective narrative style that reflects the protagonist's psychological anguish, according to critics. The narrative alternates between memory, introspection, and commentary rather than telling a straight line, which enables the protagonist to use storytelling to reconstruct her identity. Academics stress that writing turns into an essential act of empowerment and survival. By sharing her experiences, the protagonist reclaims control over her life story and confronts the silence placed on victims of domestic abuse. This viewpoint emphasizes how language serves as a vehicle for self-expression and resistance in feminist writing.

Furthermore, to these theoretical perspectives, some academics relate the book to E. V. Ramasamy's social reform philosophy and the Self-Respect Movement's

tenets. Rationalism, equality, and women's autonomy in marriage and society were central to Periyar's worldview. Scholars contend that by depicting a woman who ultimately rejects an oppressive married arrangement and asserts her autonomy and dignity, Kandasamy's story mirrors these themes. As a result, this paper illustrates how self-respect ideology is still relevant in modern feminist theory.

Thus, by analyzing *When I Hit You* from the perspectives of intersectional feminism, language resistance, and Self-Respect ideology, this study aims to close this gap. By doing this, the paper hopes to show how Kandasamy's story not only depicts the individual struggle of a woman fleeing an abusive marriage but also expresses a more comprehensive feminist perspective based on autonomy, dignity, and voice reclaim. By using this method, the book becomes a noteworthy addition to modern feminist literature that opposes patriarchal authority and upholds women's rights to liberty and self-respect.

### III. PERIYAR'S SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT: FROM CASTE TO GENDER EMANCIPATION

E. V. Ramasamy, also referred to as Periyar, whose reformist movement in South India seriously questioned the systems of socioeconomic inequity, patriarchy, and caste hierarchy. Periyar aimed to overthrow Brahminical domination and establish a society founded on equality, reason, and dignity through the Self-Respect Movement, which was started in Tamil Nadu in the 1920s. Although the movement's original goal was to end caste oppression, it later broadened its attention to include women's status in a highly patriarchal society.

For Periyar, the liberation of women was a prerequisite for the liberation of society. He vehemently opposed ancient Hindu social customs that limited women's freedom, such as child marriage, dowries, denying women access to education, and upholding rigid gender norms. Periyar claimed that these customs were not just cultural traditions but rather control mechanisms that upheld caste-based and patriarchal power structures. As a result, the Self-Respect Movement promoted drastic changes including Self-Respect marriages, which stressed equality between couples and opposed Brahminical ceremonies.

Periyar's ideology offers a framework for comprehending the idea of self-respect as a means of

struggle against patriarchal tyranny in the context of this study. This fight for autonomy and dignity in the intimate realm of marriage is reflected in the protagonist of *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. The protagonist's experiences underscore the continuance of patriarchal power that Periyar had previously criticized, despite the novel's current setting. Her quest to regain her independence and voice is similar to the Self-Respect Movement's focus on reason, self-respect, and defiance of repressive power.

Periyar's criticism of marriage as a patriarchal institution becomes especially pertinent to the story. He believed that traditional marriage was a system that frequently confined women to inferior duties in the home. The protagonist's abusive marriage serves as an example of how patriarchal power still functions in close relationships in the research paper. This study illustrates how the protagonist's fight for autonomy reflects a larger feminist resistance based in South Indian socio-political philosophy by analyzing the story through the prism of Periyar's Self-Respect ideology.

### IV. INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM: POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

This paper also intersects with more general feminist theories, especially intersectional feminism, even if Periyar's beliefs offer a significant regional and historical base. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to describe how several types of social oppression, including caste, class, gender, and race, combine to produce intricate systems of inequity. Intersectional feminism highlights the need to analyze women's experiences within several overlapping frameworks of power rather than relying solely on gender.

The widespread impact of caste and class systems makes intersectionality particularly significant in the Indian setting. According to postcolonial feminist theorists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, conventional Western feminist theories frequently ignore the unique historical and cultural circumstances that women in the Global South experience. When examining gender discrimination, their work highlights the importance of taking local power dynamics, cultural identity, and colonial history into account. Kandasamy tackles the intersections of

caste, gender, and class in her creative works as a Dalit feminist writer and activist. The experiences of a lady whose political consciousness and intellectual independence conflict with her husband's authoritarian and patriarchal views are depicted in her book. The story illustrates how patriarchal violence is a reflection of larger societal and ideological institutions as well as a personal problem.

Intersectional feminism sheds light on the ways in which the protagonist's oppression is influenced by a variety of factors, such as social standards that value male authority, ideological manipulation, and patriarchal expectations. As a result, this work becomes a potent indictment of the ways that women's identities, voices, and bodies are controlled in both public and private contexts. Furthermore, the postcolonial feminist viewpoint emphasizes the significance of narrative as a tool for political resistance. The protagonist turns personal trauma into a group critique of patriarchal dominance by sharing her experiences. Her narrative voice asserts her right to speak and be heard by challenging the customary silence placed on women who are victims of domestic abuse.

#### V. BUTLERIAN PERFORMATIVITY AND LINGUISTIC RESISTANCE

The idea of gender performativity, which was created by Judith Butler, is another significant theoretical viewpoint that guides this investigation. Butler contends that gender is constantly created and reproduced by recurring social practices, behaviors, and discourses rather than being a permanent or innate identity. To put it another way, cultural expectations and performances that people are forced to execute in society shape gender roles. Butler's theory can be used to analyze how the protagonist of *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* is compelled to fulfil the socially expected role of a faithful wife. Her spouse anticipates that she will adhere to gender standards that require submission, silence, and obedience. He tries to control her behavior and uphold these standards by using physical force and emotional manipulation.

Butler's concept of performativity theory, however, also implies that gender roles can be contested and upended because they are socially produced. In this sense, the protagonist's act of writing becomes a

pivotal point of resistance. She challenges the stereotype of the quiet, obedient wife by sharing her experiences and opinions. She can oppose the patriarchal scripts that are imposed on her and regain control of her identity through writing. In this process of resistance, language is especially important. In the article, the protagonist's spouse restricts her ability to communicate with others and discourages her from expressing herself intellectually in an effort to dominate her both physically and linguistically. The larger patriarchal tactic of denying women the power to define their own experiences is reflected in this attempt to silence her. However, the protagonist uses narrative expression to turn language into an empowerment tool. She challenges the systems of dominance that want to silence her by using her storytelling as an act of language resistance. In this way, the book illustrates how language may serve as a site of oppression as well as a tool for emancipation. In combined, these speculative vantage points A thorough framework for examining the themes of self-respect, resistance, and women's emancipation in Kandasamy's story is offered by Periyar's Self-Respect ideology, intersectional feminist theory, and Butlerian performativity. Periyar's ideology places the conversation in the historical framework of social transformation in South India, with a focus on equality and dignity. By investigating the multiple oppressive systems that influence women's experiences, intersectional feminism broadens this perspective. Lastly, Butler's performativity theory emphasizes how language and identity performance both uphold and subvert patriarchal dominance.

A few investigations specifically link self-respect as a fundamental psychological and ethical force leading to women's freedom, despite the fact that several research look at domestic violence, feminist resistance, and narrative techniques in *When I Hit You*. The majority of studies discusses resistance and empowerment in general terms without going into great detail about how regaining one's self-respect serves as a catalyst for liberation. As a result, a targeted feminist interpretation that emphasizes self-respect as transformative agency is still required.

## VI. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: SITES OF VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE

This paper examines how Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* depicts domestic violence while also showcasing various forms of resistance. The article examines the ways in which language, location, and cultural narratives are controlled by patriarchal dominance. Through introspection, linguistic subversion, and the reclaiming of mythological symbols, the protagonist simultaneously devises ways to oppose these systems. As a result, the poem turns into a potent examination of how women overcome oppression and recover their identities.

The paper's portrayal of marriage as a place of control and captivity is among its most striking features. The protagonist's marital residence serves as a literal and symbolic jail where patriarchal control limits her freedom of movement, social engagement, and personal autonomy. By methodically cutting her off from friends, family, and intellectual circles, the spouse turns the home into a monitoring and control device.

This article frequently highlights how space is used as a weapon in marriages. Doors, walls, and rooms come to represent patriarchal dominance. The protagonist's body itself turns into a contested area where punishment and acts of violence are carried out. The husband's physical attacks are manifestations of a larger patriarchal system that aims to establish male supremacy over female bodies rather than just being acts of personal rage. The politics of domestic space, where the home becomes a focal point of gendered oppression, is reflected in this spatial control, according to several feminist theorists.

The protagonist's restricted mobility serves as an example of how patriarchal systems frequently function not just in public institutions but even in close relationships. As a result, the abusive marriage serves as a microcosm of broader social hierarchy that limits women's freedom. Concurrently, the story reveals the psychological consequences of imprisonment. The protagonist feels a great deal of fear, worry, and emotional loneliness. But these conditions also result in increased consciousness. She starts to identify the systems of power that control her life through introspection and observation. As a result, the area that serves as a jail at first eventually transforms into a

place where resistance and consciousness start to surface.

This paper shows that silence does not equate to surrender, despite the husband's attempts to mute the protagonist by limiting her voice and interactions. An internal monologue that the protagonist cultivates turns into a potent form of resistance. She critically evaluates her husband's actions and challenges the patriarchal presumptions that underlie his authority through her ideas and reflections. Even when the protagonist's ability to express herself externally is limited, this inner voice enables them to retain their sense of self. Irony, sarcasm, and intellectual criticism are frequently seen in her views, indicating that she rejects the ideological framework that has been forced upon her. As a result, the internal monologue turns into a covert act of defiance against patriarchal authority. Even when the protagonist's ability to express themselves externally is limited, this inner voice enables them to retain their sense of self. Irony, sarcasm, and intellectual criticism are frequently seen in her views, indicating that she rejects the ideological framework that has been forced upon her. As a result, the internal monologue turns into a covert act of defiance against patriarchal authority.

Moreover, recalling and recounting these situations turns personal sorrow into public witness. The main character shatters the culture of silence that frequently surrounds domestic abuse. In order to maintain family honor, women are expected to suffer abuse in silence, yet her narrative voice undermines this norm. In this sense, this paper emphasizes the value of narrative and voice as instruments of empowerment. The protagonist starts regaining her agency through narrative and cognition even before she physically leaves the violent marriage. Her ultimate release is made possible by this internal opposition.

This paper explores how power relations are heavily reliant on language. The husband regularly uses ideological rhetoric to defend his violent actions, portraying himself as a revolutionary thinker while controlling his wife in an authoritarian manner. This research reveals how patriarchal dominance can be concealed by political language through this conflict. This tactic serves as a satirical dissection of conventional romantic discourse. The protagonist highlights the discrepancy between the idealized concept of love and the reality of violent relationships by offering inflated and conflicting definitions. The idea that loves always

requires women to make sacrifices or submit is debunked in this section. The story illustrates how language can be used to subvert ideological frameworks through this linguistic exploration. The protagonist claims her right to reinterpret her experiences and rejects the patriarchal narrative by redefining love in her own terms.

#### VII. MULTILINGUALISM AND CODE-SWITCHING AS ACTS OF DEFIANCE

This paper utilization of several languages and cultural allusions is another significant aspect. The protagonist's cultural and intellectual background is reflected in the story's frequent switching between English and other language terms. This multilingual approach draws attention to the variety of voices and identities that influence her viewpoint. By restricting the protagonist's conversation and suppressing her intellectual expression, the spouse tries to control language. Her ability to switch between languages and discourses, however, turns into a covert act of defiance. She defies her husband's restrictive ideological framework by using a variety of linguistic forms.

The protagonist's sense of identity is strengthened by her ability to engage with larger literary and cultural traditions thanks to her multilingualism. She is able to conceive different forms of existence because of these language shifts, which provide her with periods of escape from the controlling atmosphere of the marriage. As a result, language serves as a tool for both rebellion and dominance. The protagonist uses language as a weapon to expose and subvert patriarchal authority, while the husband tries to use language control to quiet and discipline her.

#### VIII. SELF-FASHIONING AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

The protagonist's process of self-fashioning, or the development of a new identity via story and introspection, is the last feature of this chapter. She progressively shifts from being a victim to having agency and self-awareness throughout the work. Writing is essential to this change by recording her experiences, the protagonist takes charge of her narrative and refuses to let the violent relationship

completely define who she is. Narration turns into a kind of political and psychological liberty.

In this way, the article shows that resistance isn't just about outrageous acts of defiance. Everyday activities like writing, memorizing, and comprehending cultural customs can also cause it. The protagonist is able to rebuild her dignity and create a future free from patriarchal domination thanks to these actions.

When I Hit You illustrates the intricate ways that violence and resistance coexist within patriarchal hierarchies through its examination of household space, language, and mythic symbolism. The protagonist develops her awareness and resistance tactics in the married residence, which also serves as a place of imprisonment. After serving as a tool of dominance at first, language eventually becomes a tool of empowerment and criticism. As a result, Kandasamy's work is a potent addition to modern feminist literature since it shows how acts of storytelling, linguistic inventiveness, and cultural reinterpretation can lead to women's liberation.

#### IX. CONCLUSION

This paper has used intersectional feminism, linguistic resistance, and self-respect ideology to analyze the themes of women's emancipation, resistance, and self-respect in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. The study shows that the is a research potent feminist narrative that challenges deeply ingrained patriarchal institutions in society rather than just a personal story of domestic abuse. The story reveals how patriarchal power functions through control of language, space, and cultural narratives by depicting the experiences of a young woman ensnared in an abusive marriage. The protagonist's quest to find her voice also emphasizes the transformational power of narrative, intellectual resistance, and self-awareness.

The research demonstrates how the idea of self-respect becomes essential to women's emancipation through a theoretical framework inspired by the ideas of Periyar and the tenets of the Self-Respect Movement. The Self-Respect movement's emphasis on equality, decency, and reason is reflected in the protagonist's reluctance to keep quiet and her resolve to share her experiences. Thus, the book shows that accepting one's own value and rejecting repressive social conventions are the first steps towards emancipation. The

protagonist opposes the ideological systems that strive to suppress women by taking back language and narrative authority.

This article construction of different locations of resistance is further shown by the textual analysis. The protagonist gains a critical knowledge of her oppression in domestic space, which is first portrayed as a patriarchal prison. Through narrative expression and linguistic exploration, language which the abusive spouse tries to control becomes a potent tool of resistance. In a similar vein, the protagonist can relate her own battle to a larger cultural tradition of female resistance by reclaiming mythological characters like Kannagi from the Tamil epic Silappatikaram. These storytelling techniques show that women's emancipation is a cultural and intellectual struggle in addition to a political one.

This paper conclusion has significant ramifications for the field of Indian feminist literature. The book by Kandasamy adds to the expanding corpus of modern literature that questions the normalization of domestic violence and highlights the voices of women. The essay stresses the value of personal tales in revealing structural oppression and expands the possibilities of feminist storytelling by fusing political critique with autobiographical components.

This paper also shows how intersectional viewpoints that take into account the connection between caste, gender, and social power are becoming more and more prevalent in Indian feminist literature. Feminist theory, which challenges caste-based and patriarchal hierarchies, has an impact on Kandasamy's work. As a result, by including marginalized experiences into literary and scholarly discourse, the novel enhances Indian feminist discourse

The story also demonstrates how cultural traditions may be reclaimed and reinterpreted in ways that empower women through feminist literature.

Beyond its literary value, the research serves as a more general appeal for political and social change. Meena Kandasamy emphasizes the critical need to confront gender inequity, domestic abuse, and the silencing of women's voices through the protagonist's experience. The story implies that collective movements that oppose systemic oppression must be linked to individual acts of resistance.

In a consequence, Meena Kandasamy's writing challenges readers to reevaluate the social and cultural conventions that uphold patriarchal authority. The

work encourages a broader discussion on gender justice and women's autonomy in modern society by turning personal tragedy into political witness. By doing this, it strengthens the notion that women's freedom necessitates not only individual bravery but also group solidarity and systemic change. To sum up, *When I Hit You* is a potent addition to contemporary feminist literature that shows how narrative may be used to oppose oppression. The novel acknowledges the ongoing significance of feminist efforts for equality and dignity through its examination of self-respect, voice, and cultural reclamation. In the end, this article serves as a reminder that the quest for freedom starts with having the guts to write, speak, and reclaim one's identity in the face of oppression and silence.

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