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## Women Psychology in Contemporary Indian English Literature: A Study of Meena Kandasamy's "When I hit you..."

**Meetali Hardeniya**

Research Scholar in English,

**Dr. Hemant Gehlot**

Professor of English, Govt. Girls P.G. College Ujjain

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### ABSTRACT

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The research paper deals with women psychology through the study of Meena Kandasamy's popular novel *When I Hit You or A Portrait of a writer as a young wife*. I chose this novel to analyse women psychology in literature because it is a semiautobiographical work based on the her own experiences of violence and trauma in her abusive marriage with an educated college professor. This research paper is an attempt to study the psychology of women writer of 21<sup>st</sup> century because their characters make a great impact on the mind of the reader. This work is more significant from above point of view because politics of marriage is common issue discussed amongst the contemporary women belonging to all different age groups. The novel is a powerful stream of consciousness narrative with psychological realism and interior monologue which make it a better study through psychological lens. Kandasamy's narrative justifies her belief that "The writer in me is more powerful than the woman in me,"

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Meena Kandasamy, the recipient of the Herman Kesten Prize by the PEN centre in Germany's Darmstadt (2022) for her novel "When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of The Writer as a Young Wife" published in 2017, is a Chennai based young poet, writer, translator and activist. She is also a rising face in Dalit Literature. Trauma, violence, gender inequality, caste, marital abuse are the main themes which



she explores in her poetry, prose and novels. Her novels have been shortlisted for the Women's prize for fiction, Jhalaz prize and The International Dylan Thomas Prize. She translates Tamils poem and makes it accessible for non-Tamil readers. Her other notable works are *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), poetry collection: *Touch* (2006), *Ms. Militancy* (2010), *Tomorrow, Someone Will Arrest You* (2023).

The novel under study narrates how an educated woman marries a reputed college professor and the consequences of the marriage depicting the reality by distorting all her dreams of married life.

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.

“The number one lesson I have learnt as a writer: Don't let people remove you from your own story. Be ruthless, even if it is your own mother.” (page 9)

The narrative begins with a psychological conflict between parents and their young girl about marriage as they are obsessed by what the society will say ! While the mother is obstinate to cover the reasons of her daughter's running away from the marriage, the daughter bravely speaks of breaking the so-called marriage norms of the society. This is a cruel world where a woman who runs away from death is considered more dignified than a woman who runs away from her man.

The dual image of the husband – one who is kind, educated, dashing personality for others; the other a narrow- minded abuser who takes his wife for his own property. While externally he is a revolutionary involved in the communist movement internally, he disconnects his wife from all social connections and isolates her. The man is a perfect husband for outer world carefully hides the face of a perfect monster which she discovers behind the closed doors of her house- the doors are the only witness of psychological violence which a woman faces in her life. Her husband makes strategies psychological for her breakdown because he knows the fact that it is not easy to break an educated woman who is a writer. Her husband is a socially available person in between family and friends but desperately wants to isolate her from outside world to presenting her as an introvert lady. With his good behaviour he made



himself perfectly fit into the image of good son in law. He breaks her down physically as well as mentally thereby making her helpless to raise her voice.

Through artful narration the writer emotionally connects the reader with the story. Because of the abusive behaviour of her husband, she loses her self-confidence and her self-worth is shattered. One can better understand by vivid depiction of psychological suffering of a wife, who loses her own identity under the norms of Adjustment in Marriage. She emphatically asserts 'I learn to criticise myself for who I am.' The situation turns from bad to worse when she is pressurised by her parents to adjust in the situation and hope that one day everything will be fine. The novel portrays the psychological impact of abuse in marriage which affects the psyche of protagonist and leads toward the crumbling down of her identity. In the whole story we see the inner conflict between fear, shame and raising voice against the violence.

Meena Kandasamy has an art of writing about violence, psychology of women, masculine abusing, desire, seduction spread all across the novel, *When I Hit You ...* The novel deals with her animal like treatment, masculine psychology behind marital rape used as means of punishment for what she must have to do as her mandatory work as a wife.

The eye-opening work of Kandasamy gives a very heart rendering psychological description of woman in the novel. The novel ends with complex psychological themes such as psychological transformation of protagonist from victimhood to empowerment. Breaking the silence to overcome from trauma and regain her own life. And novel left a question for readers about the serious evaluation of woman's place in contemporary Indian society.

To conclude we can say Psychology and literature are interconnected with each other and they are continuously evolving with time. The paper attempts to study the toxic masculinity and rigid socio-cultural values that make a person helpless and voiceless.

Over the years there has been noticeable shift in the way women were depicted in literature. From weak and humble women, the identity shifts towards brave and bold and now women depicted as an empowered woman. Now the author talks about various aspects of women's life like relationship, their struggles, breaking taboos of society. In the novel we see epigraphs in each chapter which contains lines from Kamala Das, Margaret Atwood, Anne Sexton and others proves the impact of their work on Kandasamy. *When I Hit You...* is known for its powerful exploration of psychological aspects of



women which make connectivity with the readers of all age and gender. There is a great emphasis on exploring the psychological depth of women characters for more inclusive and progressive depiction.

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