

**MEENA KANDASAMY'S WHEN I HIT YOU OR A PORTRAIT OF
THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG WIFE: PORTRAYS THE NEW ROLE OF
MODERN WOMEN IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

Dr. Aattika D.

Assistant Professor,
Sourashtra College for Women,
Pasumalai, Madurai

Abstract

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You or the Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife* (2017). It is a dazzling and provocative novel of an abusive marriage. Seduced by politics, poetry and an enduring dream of building a better world together, the unnamed narrator falls in love with a university professor. University Professor called her in the past the 'whores' are the links between the colonizer and the colonized but today the writer who writes in English, who is the link, the bridge is the 'whore'. She is stopped from preparing her articles saying that she is not allowed to be a writer-whore. He stresses on that he owns her and she has to follow his wishes. She feels nauseous and robbed of her identity. The unnamed narrator finally bravely escape from her husband.

Keywords: Nauseous, Stiletto, Kohl, Bourgeois, Narcissism

"I was being routinely beaten and it had become unbearable for me to keep playing the role the good Indian wife" (3).

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You or the Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife* (2017) is expressed the unnamed narrator abused by his husband, finally bravely escape from her husband. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You or A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife* (2017) is the unnamed story writer's survival. It is a dazzling and provocative novel of an abusive marriage. After battling the silence forced upon her, the speaker attains liberation through her fierce use of language which she uses sometimes to play along with the abusive husband in order to avoid possible violence and some other times to provoke him. To cope, to escape, she dons the role of a writer marking plot points from her own abusive marriage. Her words are her only shield weapons. She slips her words between his ribs like a stiletto knife. When the novel reaches its end the speaker portrays the new role of modern women in the contemporary society.

This paper aims to dissect and display the male chauvinist consciousness that aims to overpower women in a domestic environment. In total the entire book travels around the life of the writer as a woman. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes Primrose Villa, her husband's place, as a place of kept secrets, an enclosed space of unheard and unvoiced secrets of her marriage. Her movement is restricted within the walls of Primrose Villa which becomes her setting to act. "It is only one of the expectations I must consider in my role as a perfect wife," (15). The language barrier limits her further to speak only the words of wifely domesticity when she shops for vegetables or buys cleaning products etc.

The First few days of marriage has its own charm as she suits her tastes and her dressing style according to his taste "I begin by wearing my hair the way he wants it: gathered and tamed into a ponytail, oiled, sleek, with no sign of disobedience. I skip the kohl around my eyes because he believes that it is worn only by screen-sirens and seductresses" (15). She transforms herself into a blank paper which is ready to be written with new words and commands. Her husband is a man who is kind to strangers but can't extend his kindness to his wife. He frowns upon what he perceives as his wife's vacillating petit bourgeois poet-prostitute-female-writer ways. He finds mistakes with everything that she does. Like any coward, he uses small failures as an excuse to hit her. To manage the situation she satisfies her husband with a "requisite Humility" (19) that make his male mind satisfactory. Being a communist lover the writer-wife marries a communist-professor-husband who, after marriage, changes himself into a husband-teacher to teach his wife-student the ways of a typical, obedient wife.

A few days into marriage the husband starts to shed his mask of a perfect husband when he burns himself in the kitchen as a preventive measure to get herself out of Facebook. The reason he gives is that he can't go along with the narcissism and exhibitionism of Facebook and says that his wife's "peep show" (50) will endanger him. In the next ten minutes, she cuts

off her lifeline to the outside world by deactivating her Facebook account. She commits a temporary "I deactivate my Facebook account. It is my lifeline to the world outside"(52) and bids farewell to the world with a final message which says that she was busy with a writing project.

She feels nauseous and robbed of her identity when she comes to know that her emails have been replied by her husband. The justification and denial by her parents further deepen the wounds inflicted on her "Suspicion is in the nature of men; it is in the nature of love" (56). She's told it's for her own good and is instructed to be patient. She's advised to have a child to mend the brute. She fights for the rights of an imprisoned wife with silence and when she questions beatings and rapes follow, with everyday middle-class implements weaponized: the hose of the washing machine and the power cord for her laptop. Shame, pride and a society in which everyone from parents to police expects a woman to put up and shut up force the realization that only she can save herself.

He says in the past the 'whores' are the links between the colonizer and the colonized but today the writer who writes in English, who is the link, the bridge is the 'whore'. She is stopped from preparing her articles saying that she is not allowed to be a writer-whore. He stresses on that he owns her and she has to follow his wishes. 'The institution of marriage creates its own division of labor' (84) and the divider is the husband. In the field of marriage, the only place where she has her upper hand is the area of the kitchen where she cannot be insulted or overcome by his hurtful words. In her tiny world called the kitchen, the food overshadows the domestic insults and abuses. She becomes a part of the structure of a so-called happy marriage which has its own forms and functions. She becomes like the peg on the clothesline, the gem clip on the table, the woman in the kitchen who transforms into the submissive between the sheets.

One fine day the husband sets the wife completely free by deleting all her emails erasing everything from her past. The narrator's only escape from the brutality and the curfews imposed on her is by writing letters. Though the narrator is a feminist she gets trapped in an abusive marriage. She erases her individuality completely and punishes herself by staying silent when the words flood her with their presence and refuse to dislodge themselves from her tongue "A Sentiment becomes a charge sheet. A statement becomes a sentence" (123). She never understood violence until it happened to her. She never understood that sex is disgusting and painful until she was raped by her husband.

"When he hits me, the terror flows from the fear that today he uses his bare hands, but tomorrow he could wield a heavy-buckled belt, he could grab an iron rod, he could throw the chair, that he could break open my head against a wall. Every day, I inch closer to death, to dying, to be killed, to the fear that I will end up in a fight whose result I cannot reverse (155). "In India, a bride is burnt every ninety minutes"(187)

Her husband tries to control her body, but he will never control her mind. It was your tongue in your mouth that forced me into silence. It was your tongue in your mouth that forced me into submission. And then, it was your tongue in your mouth that forced me. (173)

The husband aims to fill her womb by forcing himself on her, but she bravely decides to keep the place of peace, the womb, empty. She transfers the emptiness of her life to her womb and doesn't want to carry a man's child who beat her, raped her on a bed where a 'no' held no meaning and called her a whore. She uses her skills in the kitchen to secure her womb's liberty. So she begins a plot to escape. Men who marry a girl for a dowry treat her nicely, Men who marry her for other reasons, well, this is how it ends." (231)

"I decided that I will not allow myself to be portrayed as the hot-blooded woman who ran away from one man into the wide open arms of another. I will not allow myself to become the good wife, the good mother, the good-for-nothing woman that marriage aims to reduce me to. I will not allow my story to become a morality tale" (208).

She takes everything that has been stripped of her by him- Passport, ATM, laptop, phone and most importantly her freedom. She leaves the miserable city at night shedding it like a second skin. She transforms into an anti-fragile and unbreakable woman who is not afraid of men. She enters the world of books; the world which welcomes her with willingness; the world created by her in words; She is still caught in the web of the bad marriage as she and her parents face the questions posed by the society post marriage. But still, she likes the peaceful niceness of life sans domestic violence and the chokehold of marriage. She begins the process of forgetting and healing and indulges herself with her world made up of words, sentences, and books.

She hides her scars behind her neatness in dressing "my scars are my secrets" (239). She hides her real worn out physical self behind the body she makes up with words which are perfect and invincible, devoid of any scars. It's completely under her control. She wraps her body with words which are protected against the prying eye, against inspection and against the hands of others. "I am the woman who is not a good Hindu girl, a good Tamil girl, a good Kerala girl, a good Indian girl. I am not any of the categories I thought I was, I am not any of the categories I was molded into being" (247). She conjured a brave self out of words to take on the life of a woman afraid of facing her own reality. The wife swings on the pendulum of choice. One moment she is alive and another moment she is dead. She is kind of alive that feels dead.

Work Cited

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