



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The politics of marriage: Exploring the intersection of love, violence and power in “*When I Hit You*” by Meena Kandasamy

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Abstract

Violence against women cuts across cultures and is evident in the public and private spheres. In most patriarchal societies, such abuse is legitimized within marriage. Meena Kandasamy's “*When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*” is a scathing critique of marriage as an institution that often combines love with power and violence and reveals subtle, but devastating forms of abuse women suffer. This study examines the heroine's experiences of emotional, psychological, and sexual torture at the hands of a masochistic husband; however, her journey into resistance and freedom is interwoven with it. The study uses the feminist and postcolonial theoretical paradigm to question how colonial and patriarchal legacies in society perpetuate gender oppression. The study's qualitative analysis of the text foregrounds marriage as a contested site, where love and loyalty often camouflage control and domination. It delves into why women like the protagonist stay in abusive relationships and survival strategies. Findings underscore the systemic nature of intimate partner violence, sociocultural factors that bind women to abusive relationships, and the survival as well as defiance strategies they adopt. The study advances feminist and postcolonial discourse through the amplification of the voice of the protagonist; it challenges the normalization of violence in marital spaces and the need to re-imagine love and agency within oppressive patriarchal contexts.

Keywords: Marriage, Domestic violence, Patriarchy, Feminism, Resistance, Emotional abuse, Gender oppression.

Introduction

Marriage, a timeless institution celebrated in countless cultures, stands as a symbol of love, unity, and companionship. Yet beneath its gilded façade often lies a terrain fraught with complexities, especially for women (Brook, 2002). Beyond the veils and vows, marriage has long been a site where the personal becomes political, where the sacred union of love often masks a power struggle steeped in patriarchal traditions (Marso, 2003). For many women, the dream of marriage—imbued with promises of belonging and security—has become a nightmare of control,

submission, and violence. Meena Kandasamy's “*When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*” is a haunting, unflinching narrative that forces its readers to confront the dark underbelly of marital life. Through the lens of a young writer trapped in a violently abusive marriage, the novel examines how societal expectations, cultural conditioning, and gendered power dynamics render the institution of marriage a crucible of control (Sangeetha *et al.*, 2022).

Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy, born in 1984, is an Indian poet, fiction writer, translator, and activist based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Her work is deeply infused with themes of feminism and the anti-caste annihilation movement, reflecting her personal experiences of being attacked and marginalized by societal norms. Meena is well-known for her bold stance against patriarchy and the caste system. Growing up in a marginalized nomadic tribe, she examines caste oppression through a feminist perspective, expressing her views in anthologies, novels, magazine columns, and on social media (Das, 2022).

“Some women are never physically hit, but their abusers manage to dominate, ridicule and belittle them in hundreds of non-violent ways” (Kandaswamy, 2017).

Kandasamy was a novelist, famous for her ability to narrate complex, often painful, realities of marginalized communities and women. She challenges patriarchal as well as caste structures with crude emotion and incisive political

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critique. That made it to the shortlist for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2018, *"When I Hit You"* is considered a landmark text exemplifying her fearless work toward issues of domestic violence and marital rape and women's resistivities. Kandasamy and literature keep inspiring dialogues that work toward justice, equality, and feminist thought of action (Kashyap, 2018).

In *"When I Hit You,"* marriage is stripped of its romantic veneer, exposing it as a battleground where love and violence intersect, highlighting the destructive nature of patriarchy. The narrator's husband, who appears to embrace progressive ideals, manipulates the institution of marriage to undermine her autonomy and stifle her spirit. This relationship illustrates how the politics of marriage can shift from a means of liberation to a tool of oppression (Sasipriya, 2017).

"Marriage has ruined my romanticism, by teaching me that this thing of beauty can be made crude. Bitch. Whore. Slut. And yet, for every insult that has been flung in my face" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

The protagonist in *"When I Hit You,"* an anonymous writer, reflects the heart of the novel: a struggle for power and gendered violence. She is a woman who is between vulnerability and resilience, and she embarks on married life with great hope for a shared intellectual partnership that instead becomes a trap in the oppressive relationship. Her husband, who is an abusive, manipulative professor with toxic masculinity, is using dominance, intimidation, and even violence to exercise his power. In public, however, the family of the protagonist acts as an encouragement, but the societal norms have it giving superiority to marriage over the individual's good, leading to further suffering in her (Sangeetha, 2022).

"Every day, I inch closer to death, to dying, to being killed, to the fear that I will end up in a fight whose result I cannot reverse" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

At the heart of *"When I Hit You"* lies a look into how gender and culture intersect with societal expectations at a given time to paint out the contours of marriage. Women are conditioned right from a tender age on what it means to be well placed and respected in society, if not for marriage. They take this role as caretakers, peacemakers, and martyrs, sacrificing their dreams and desires at the altar of marital harmony. Her story serves as a tragic indictment of such conditioning. She enters the marriage with hope and love and finds herself trapped in abuse, gaslighting, and humiliation (Kaur et al., 2022).

Culture plays a crucial role in maintaining these dynamics. In many societies, marriage is seen as a sacred obligation, and women who choose to leave abusive relationships often face stigma, labeled as failures or rebels. This is evident in the way the narrator's mother speaks to her, encouraging her to endure and adapt instead of seeking escape. This

reflects a deeply ingrained belief that a woman's value is tied to her ability to uphold a marriage, regardless of its toxicity. Such expectations foster an environment where women feel stifled, their voices drowned out by the overwhelming pressure of societal norms (Goyal, 2020).

The novel interrogates the role of community in enhancing oppressive marital structures. The isolation of the narrator has moored deeper by others who have turned a deaf ear to her; the neighbors who turned blind to her suffering, the friends who chose to ignore the warning signs of her plight, and the society at large which sacrificed individuals' well-being upon the altar of appeasing public gaze. This collective silence equally contributes to her suffering as the fist of her husband: very much indicative of how deeply patriarchy has entrenched itself into the collective conscience of society.

"Controlling the personal space, freedom and the body of a woman, in a conjugal marital relationship leads to the psychological domination of women. Reversely, having complete authority over the mind of women would ensure their complete subjugation" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

In a context in which marriage dynamics, particularly suasive of patriarchal power dynamics, become illuminated by a critical perspective, feminist theory provides a starker perspective through which to view the dynamics of marriage. Feminists have long argued that marriage, as it has been traditionally constructed, is an institution that subjugates women and relegates them to the role of wife and mother, denying them individuality and agency. Simone de Beauvoir's argument that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" resonates in *"When I Hit You."* The transition of the narrator, from an idealistic bride to a battered spouse, portrays how marriage imposes stifling gender relations on women by divesting them of their individuality and freedom (Kandasamy, 2017).

"Indian men are still beating up their wives. These men associate violence with disciplinary action. Women are still expected to be submissive, to obey their husbands as if they are lord and master. The violence that takes place in homes is so normalized" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

Love is also portrayed as a delusive force. In painful inversion, love becomes the active instrument to justify subjugation and violence. The narrator's husband privileges her fondness as a means by which he can establish superiority and efface her independence. This interplay allows one to highlight this systemic and insidious exercise of patriarchal power, in many forms, which operates not just by overt coercion, but by manipulation of affection and trust (Dwivedy, 2024).

"When I Hit You" highlights the importance of feminist solidarity in confronting the oppression entrenched within married life. The narrator's flight from an abusive husband is not just a courageous step, but also a political statement

against the very system that allows for the abuse. Writing her story, through which she regains her narrative, is an act of resistance and refusal to be silenced or defined by the trauma. The act of telling her story becomes one of feminist agency, channeling her pain into empowerment and encouraging other women to wrestle with their own subjugation (Gold & Anish).

This depiction of the complex emotional process brought on by abuse is eye-opening and realistically gurgling; it engages on a human level. The interior pain of the narrator is not merely physical; it wears the unmistakable signs of psychology and existentialism. For her gradual acknowledgment by her husband is the torturous reminder of how violence, whether overt or subtle, rots the soul. The novel puts pressure on the readers to grapple with the hard truth that love can constrict the individual inside the prison of power. It makes us face the truth that we are complicit, whether out of silence, apathy, or conforming to the norms prioritizing the marriage institution over personal security. It asks for nothing less than her empathy, and then her action in causing change—militant against all oppressive beliefs, supportive of the victims, and adamant for changes in the very ethos of societal structures that repose order (Sangeetha, 2022).

"When I Hit You" goes beyond just telling the story of a woman's experience in an abusive marriage; it serves as a powerful critique of marriage as an institution influenced by patriarchal values. The narrative reveals how love, violence, and power intertwine to form a harmful dynamic that ensnares women in ongoing cycles of abuse. By delving into the relationships between gender, culture, and societal norms, the novel highlights the entrenched inequalities that exist within marriage and advocates for a fundamental rethinking of this institution (Mandal).

"Hope prevents me from taking my own life. Hope is the kind voice in my head that prevents me from fleeing. Hope is the traitor that chains me to this marriage. Those things will change for the better tomorrow. The hope that he will eventually give up violence" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

Examined through its feminist lens, the novel serves as an account of the protagonist's horror and resilience and at the same time is a clarion call for justice, equality, and the very evident power of storytelling. It tells us that, as it currently stands, no marriage can be separated from the very political framework that underpins and it is only through confronting these politics that an assassin force can dismantle whatever supports violence and oppression. The novelist describes an unnamed narrator, a young writer who almost inadvertently marries a seemingly progressive college professor, and at last, ends up in a violently abusive relationship (Sasipriya, 2017).

The narrative, through her voice, delves deeply in the psychological and physical torture she goes through, her

gradual isolation from friends and family, and her efforts to reclaim her autonomy and identity. Love, Violence, and Control dynamics play, Women's systemic subjugation under patriarchal societies, and the triumph of storytelling as an act of rebellion constitute the generalizations of this novel. The study aims to critically examine marriage as a political institution, delving into the entanglement of gender, social expectations, and cultural norms, while analyzing how feminist theories expose the deeply entrenched inequalities and power relations that underlie marital violence.

Research Objectives

Obj-1.

To explore the interplay of love, violence, and power as depicted in the institution of marriage in *"When I Hit You."*

Obj-2.

To analyze the influence of socio-political ideologies on the perpetuation of control and abuse in intimate relationships.

Obj-3.

To investigate how the protagonist redefines love and agency by resisting patriarchal norms and reclaiming her voice.

Research Questions

- How does the novel portray the intersection of love, violence, and power within the institution of marriage?
- In what ways does the novel critique the role of socio-political ideologies in shaping power dynamics in marital relationships?
- How does the protagonist's journey challenge traditional narratives of love and submission in patriarchal societies?

Literature Review

Marriage in Feminist Literature

Feminist literature has extensively examined the institution of marriage and its impact on women's lives. The concept of marriage has encountered significant transformations throughout the ages, with some feminist writers analyzing its role in molding women's lives and social expectations (Davies, 2024). In the nineteenth century, marriage was a pivotal institution for women, to the extent that it appeared to guarantee them their social standing and direct the course of their lives (Dhankar *et al.*, 2024). While it gave them their social uplift, it took away their political and financial freedom (Chi, 2024). Early feminist authors like Mary Wollstonecraft in *"A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"* defined marriage as a point of subjugation for women, allowing society to force them into the domestic mold, subjecting them to denied education and independence (Wollstonecraft, 2016). Virginia Woolf extends this indictment, especially in *"A Room of One's Own,"* for she so ardently resounded that patriarchal

marriages inhibited women from displaying their creative and intellectual powers (Wolf 20). During the Victorian era, an increasing imbalance between the sexes caused concern regarding the growing number of unmarried women (Biswas, 2024). Feminist literary criticism has used gender as a primary organizing concept to analyze the construction of gender in the literature (Chakraborty, 2023). This approach permits a more temperate performance towards understanding how marriage is represented in literature and what this means for women's lives (Chaudhuri, 2024).

The Politics of Power and Violence

Indian female novelists have gained insights into the politics of power and violence in marriage through their literary works (Stark, 2007). Bhutto's novel, *"The Shadow of the Crescent Moon,"* examines the factors that stubbornly intersect with violence against women and gives expression to the working of three intersecting manifestations: direct, structural, and cultural violence at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Mihalik, 2024). The novel portrays how all forms of violence against women, physical abuse, and sexual assault all included, become normalized and codified as cultural mores and institutional inequalities dictate. At once, while Bhutto's work is rooted in Pakistan, quite similar themes resound in the Indian context. The plays of Mahesh Dattani are an example that delves into the question of gender discrimination, incest, patriarchy, and women's subordination in the Indian context (Tiwari, 2023). Indian women novelists and playwrights have efficiently demonstrated the complex play of power and violence in marriage (Katrak, 2006). Their works not only unraveled the bitter truths that women encounter but also propagated the way for women's empowerment and gender equality (Anderson, 2010). These literary contributions are extremely important in voicing the experiences of mute women and helping to add a vision of a just and equitable society (Basu, 2015).

Existing Studies on "When I Hit You"

The academic critique of Meena Kandasamy's *"When I Hit You"* unanimously praises its raw and naked treatment of domestic violence, contributing to feminist literature, and telling the story of resistance (Sasipriya, 2017). Scholars have examined the novel's autobiographical elements, its critique of patriarchal institutions, and its intersectionality in addressing cultural and societal mores that facilitate and support abuse (Kisner, 2023). The portrayal of the parents' behavior as a Young Wife replicates Wollstonecraft's theories. Reviews frequently highlight Kandasamy's poetic prose and her nuanced portrayal of the psyche after suffering marital violence (Goyal, 2020). However, numerous existing research gaps, such as how love, power, and violence concur to shape her journey. These dimensional structures of how love is used as a weapon to impose control or to support

power structures through marital violence need far more scholarly attention. These have not been attended to in other ways, leaving open the field for further probing into the intricacies of the interplays of the protagonist's resistance and liberation.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework serves as the foundation for analyzing and interpreting the core aspects of a study. It provides a structured approach to understanding the key concepts, relationships, and variables that shape the research. Grounding the analysis in established theories ensures a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

Feminist Theories on Marriage and Power

"Patriarchal marriage does not encourage intimacy or equality. It often functions as a place where male dominance and female submission are enacted"(Hooks, 2004)

Feminist theories on marriage and power are rooted in the works of several key feminist theorists. While no single "founder" can be pinpointed for the entire theory, Feminist theories first came out in published works in 1794, including works such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *"A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"* and Navajo myths like *"The Changing Woman,"* which glorifies a woman's role in repopulating the world (Wollstonecraft, 2016). Feminist theories have long criticized marriage as a patriarchal institution, which enhances the imbalance in power distribution between the two genders. "Marriage as an institution is not only about love, but it's about control and power,"(Hooks, 2004) Simone de Beauvoir in *"The Second Sex"* described marriage as a tool for confining women to the roles that benefit male desires and societal expectations (Buckland, 1893). The feminist views depicted in *"When I Hit You"* explain how marriage is used as a political construct instead of being an individual contract. It is through the application of these theories that Kandasamy's story reveals that marriage is not a private space but a site where power relations are reproduced in society (Bakshi). These feminist theories create a lens to dissect how the novel critiques not only marital violence but also the broader systems that sustain patriarchal dominance.

The novel explores the abusive marriage of a young, nameless writer, in which traditional conceptions of marriage are constructed on power imbalances, control, and the repression of individual agency, particularly by women. In the experiences of the protagonist, the text probes the social construction of marriage as a means to assure male dominance and normalize female subordination, as radical feminism would involve. This sounds like Adrienne Rich's criticism of the institution of compulsory heterosexuality and Catherine MacKinnon's critical analysis of marriage as a place for institutionalized dominance (Farwell, 1977). The act of leaving the marriage and regaining her identity speaks to feminist resistance against oppression at the

systems level (Jackson, 1992). The unflinching description of marital violence and its psychological implications serves as a lens through which one challenges the normalization of patriarchal abuse in what seems to be sacred relationships, seeking empowerment, equity, and structural reform (Sangeetha *et al.*, 2022).

The theory of coercive control

The theory of coercive control, introduced by Evan Stark in his 2006 book *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*, expands the understanding of domestic abuse beyond just physical violence (Dutton *et al.*, 2005). According to this theory, *"The perpetrators of coercive control use various means to hurt, humiliate, intimidate, exploit, isolate, and dominate their victims. Like hostages, victims of coercive control are frequently deprived of money, food, access to communication, or transportation and often survival resources even as they are cut off from family, friends, and other supports"* (Stark, 2007). In *"When I Hit You,"* these stark ideas are powerfully illustrated through the protagonist's experience of marital violence. Her husband exemplifies the disciplinary power Stark describes, employing tactics such as isolation, emotional degradation, and physical abuse to assert his control. Kandasamy's work supports Stark's assertion that resistance is a fundamental aspect of power dynamics.

Kandasamy skilfully reveals how coercive control is normalized through patriarchal structures. The narrative of the disappearance of agency shown in the female protagonist reflects exactly how social mythology surrounding marriage and sacrifice strengthens this abuse. There is a purposeful dismantling of her as a writer shown by the action of her husband, pushing her into the frame of a more submissive, silencing figure. This corresponds to Stark's theory that coercive control is all about achieving dominance through a systematic deprivation of autonomy, reducing the victim to a state of compliance (Wilson, 2001). The novel further criticizes the societal complicity that enables coercive control. In so far as it highlights stigma and cultural expectations that discourage women from leaving abusive relationships, Kandasamy underscores the intersection of coercive control with social and cultural norms. The final escape of the protagonist symbolizes a reclamation of her autonomy, thus challenging the structures of power that perpetuate coercive control in intimate relationships (Das, 2022).

Postcolonial Perspectives

Postcolonial theory, notably shaped by Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), emerged in the 1970s as a key critical framework, offering insights into the dynamics between colonial power, culture, and identity. Said describes *Orientalism* as *"a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"* (Said, 1976). Gayatri Spivak famously states, *"The subaltern cannot speak"* (Guha,

1988), highlighting the silencing of oppressed voices, especially in a postcolonial context. It provides an essential perspective for examining the interplay of gender, culture, and power in *"When I Hit You."* Postcolonial feminist scholars contend that the legacies of colonialism have profoundly shaped societal norms, often intensifying patriarchal oppression in postcolonial contexts (Epstein, 2014). Similarly, Fanon argues, *"The colonized world is a world cut in two"* (Fanon, 1961), suggesting a profound division between colonizer and colonized that persists in the psychological and physical realms of postcolonial life (Dwivedy, 2024).

Kandasamy also scrutinizes patriarchal collusion within the postcolonial state. However much political power such societies enjoy, they recreate hierarchical structures—caste and female oppression. To prove this notion, Kandasamy employs her heroine to signify that the continuation of this same structure enforces internalization and colonization—the spaces of 'domestication' become loci of exercising power. The stigmatization of divorce and the cultural idealization of marriage serve as tools for maintaining this dominance, underscoring the deeply embedded nature of patriarchal systems (Hung, 2019). The protagonist's journey of resistance reflects a postcolonial reclaiming of agency, akin to national struggles for self-determination. Her escape from the abusive marriage signifies a rejection of the structures that seek to oppress and define her. The first-person narrative increases the restorative power of this act of resistance since the protagonist regains the use of her voice and tells her story in the contestation of silencing both by her perpetrator and societal norms. This is similar to postcolonial writers reclaiming their histories and voices from colonial narratives (Goyal, 2020).

Analysis and Discussion

Typically, young girls fantasize about marrying a prince-like figure. However, in reality, their dreams often fall short of their expectations. As a result, they attempt to conform to their partner's desires and preferences. In doing so, they struggle to maintain emotional stability, as human emotions naturally ebb and flow over time. This vulnerability can lead them to make grave mistakes. In the novel *'When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife'*, Kandasamy shares her experiences as an abused and dehumanized wife in South India. Her husband, a respected English lecturer at a university, gradually takes control of every aspect of her life, both in her writing and her public speaking. Kandasamy tells her story through an unnamed narrator. The challenges faced by the narrator are ones that many women still encounter, even in this technologically advanced age. The narrative serves as a fictionalized account of her own married life (Rakshit).

"I feel nauseous. I feel robbed of my identity. I am no longer myself if another person can so easily claim to be me, pretend to be me, and assume my life while we live under the same roof" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

In *"When I Hit You,"* Meena Kandasamy reveals the deceptive nature of love that is often exploited for control and manipulation in abusive relationships. The abuser initially surrounds the protagonist with an illusion of love, presenting himself as a charming and intelligent partner, which conceals his deep-seated need for dominance. This façade is gradually stripped away as the protagonist becomes more isolated and endures his psychological, verbal, and physical abuse. What was once seen as a unifying force of love is exposed as a tool for subjugation and silencing (Azhar).

The novel critiques the romanticized notions of love that prevail in societal narratives, contrasting them with the protagonist's harsh lived experience. Kandasamy illustrates how these ideals can ensnare individuals in toxic relationships, as the fear of losing love or facing societal judgment keeps the victim tethered to the abuser. The protagonist's awakening to the fact that love has been turned into a weapon against her marks a pivotal moment in her path to resistance. This tension between the perceived purity of love and its darker, controlling aspects highlights the patriarchal conditioning that equates love with obedience and self-sacrifice for women.

"I am the wooden cutting board banged against the countertop. I am the clattering plates flung into cupboards. I am the unwashed glass being thrown to the floor. Shatter and shards and diamond sparkle of tiny pieces. My hips and thighs and breasts and buttocks. Irreversible crashing sounds, a fragile sight of brokenness as a petty tyrant indulges in a power trip. Not for the first time, and not for the last" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

In these lines from *"When I Hit You,"* Meena Kandasamy powerfully illustrates the protagonist's ordeal of physical and emotional abuse inflicted by her husband. The vivid imagery of household items like the cutting board, plates, and glass being violently hurled captures the destructive nature of the assaults, often sparked by trivial accusations such as the amount of salt in her cooking or the words in her writing that anger him. The metaphor of shattered glass represents the irreversible harm done to the protagonist's body and spirit, highlighting her sense of brokenness within a tyrannical power dynamic. The recurring theme of violence emphasizes that this is a continuous cycle, not an isolated event, leaving her trapped in a state of fear and helplessness (Alapati *et al.*, 2022).

Kandasamy portrays marriage not just as a personal bond but as a political institution that reinforces societal norms and gender hierarchies. The protagonist's marriage serves as a microcosm of patriarchal oppression, with the roles and expectations placed upon her mirroring the larger cultural realities of postcolonial societies. Through her experiences, the novel reveals how marriage is frequently utilized as a means to uphold male dominance and female subjugation, perpetuating systems of control that reach

beyond the domestic realm (Warjurkar).

"Nothing loud, nothing eye-catching, nothing beautiful. I should look like a woman whom no one wants to look at or more accurately, whom no one even sees" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

In the case of the protagonist, marriage takes away her independence and imposes a strict gender hierarchy. Her husband's ongoing desire to control her intellectual and creative endeavors illustrates how marriage can act as a tool to stifle female individuality. By emphasizing these dynamics, Kandasamy critiques the cultural idealization of marriage as an institution that promotes tradition and morality, while concealing its role in sustaining systemic inequality.

"Intimacy between the partners includes closeness and emotional sharing of their happiness and sadness which transferred to a meaningful sexual relationship which bears a fruitful child. But her abusive husband forces her to have a child as his belief of sex" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

In this passage from *"When I Hit You,"* Meena Kandasamy highlights the contrast between the idealized view of intimacy between partners—where emotional closeness and shared experiences foster a meaningful sexual relationship and the possibility of having a child—and the grim reality faced by the protagonist due to her abusive husband. He perceives sex as a mechanical act rooted in ancestral traditions, stripping intimacy of love and mutual respect, reducing it to mere reproduction. His relentless demand for a child, despite the protagonist's emotional and physical suffering, emphasizes the patriarchal belief that a woman's body exists solely to satisfy male desires. The protagonist reflects poignantly that while elders may believe life begins through this process, they overlook the fact that the child growing inside her is shaped not just by her physical being but also by the emotional scars and tears of a broken woman, underscoring the painful repercussions of forced motherhood.

"I must learn that a Communist woman is treated equally and respectfully by comrades in public but can be slapped and called a whore behind closed doors. This is dialectics" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

The novel is a condemnation of how patriarchal societies normalize violence as part of the matrimony structure. Through cultures and societal pressures, abuses are brushed off, perpetuating the notion that only a strong woman tolerates all and sundry since endurance marks her goodness. Kandasamy dispels this by showing through this protagonist's mental/emotional toll that such violence accumulates. She highlights, through her vivid portrayal, the urgent need to deal with the cultural acceptance of abuse and the silencing of women's voices within patriarchal structures (Table 1).

"The loss of telephonic communication doesn't wound me too much. But what I find impossible to fathom is how I now find

Table 1: Narrative style and Literary devices

Aspect	Description	Purpose
Fragmented Narratives	The story is presented in non-linear fragments, mirroring the protagonist's disoriented psychological state.	Reflects the chaos of trauma and the gradual process of reclaiming identity.
Symbolism	Recurrent symbols such as writing (liberation) and the protagonist's body (battleground of control).	Highlight's themes of oppression and the transformative power of self-expression.
Poetic Language	The prose is poetic and evocative, interspersed with raw, brutal realism.	Captures the emotional depth of the protagonist's experiences while critiquing societal norms.
Metaphors	Metaphors like violence as imprisonment convey the protagonist's emotional entrapment.	Illustrates the intangible aspects of trauma, resistance, and personal transformation.
Irony	The narrative uses irony to expose the contradictions in societal views of marriage and abuse.	Undermines the cultural justifications for abusive relationships, prompting critical reflection on societal norms

myself in the position of having my online freedom curtailed. I never thought that it would be so important to me until it was" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

At its core, *"When I Hit You"* is a resistance story and a reclaiming of agency. The very journey of the protagonist in terms of transformation from a victim to an empowered being shapes the crux of the narrative. Even in relentless abuse, her inner will and creative energy are survival tools. Writing becomes an act of defiance, and she begins to reclaim her voice while resisting the dehumanizing acts that have been brought upon her.

"The husband calls writers whores as they act like the bridge as in colonial India. He ridicules her constantly for being a writer. He uses the words slut, whore, bitch to dehumanise her and the language to insult a woman in various ways. To oppress her by As a defence against the abuse and her sense of reverence towards being a writer, she thinks to use the writing to wage defiance against her husband much to his annoyance. —Everything is writing material for you isn't it You're only after a story, and you make my life a living hell" (Kandaswamy, 2017).

In *"When I Hit You,"* the abusive husband repeatedly dehumanizes his protagonist, especially about her identity as a writer. He hates the "petty bourgeois writers" and ridicules her profession by referring to her derogatory names such as "slut," "whore," and "bitch." The language used here is not only insulting but also used to subdue her agency, which reflects the patriarchal desire to control and demean her. He accuses her of taking material from every aspect of their lives as a subject for her writing, so all the creative work she does is a betrayal of their relationship. In a moment of defiant rebellion, the protagonist becomes a writer as a kind of resistance, albeit slightly tentative at first. Though he belittles her in comments such as *"Everything is writing material for you, isn't it? The trouble is that you don't want a decent chance at life. You're only after a story, and you make my life a living hell"* (241), she starts using her emotions to write poetry. She knows that her writing, though unconfident today, shall someday become a powerful defying tool and a way for her to find her voice again, to combat oppression.

In *"When I Hit You,"* Meena Kandasamy subverts the stereotype of abused women as helpless victims and instead portrays the protagonist as a complex figure of resilience and resistance. She does not succumb to her trauma but navigates it actively, using suffering as a catalyst for reclaiming autonomy. Her eventual leave-out from her abusive husband from her life is so deep that it becomes the process of symbolic self-acts of liberation, proving individual agency and refusal in subjugation through abuse. Hence, Kandasamy points at the transformative power of expression from the self and the strong case for the agency in overthrowing the shackles that result from oppression, shattering the societal narratives and words that silence and decrease them.

The discussion underlines how much the narrative is a tangle of love, marriage, and violence, which intermingle to create elements meant to maintain patriarchal structures. By critically considering what happens to the protagonist, this novel challenges the existing nature of societal norms while compelling the re-evaluation of traditions and their institutions within such societies. Through its heart-rending narration, these themes not only illustrate suffering at the individual level but also advocate for wider changes in society.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Meena Kandasamy's *"When I Hit You"* probes into the notions of marriage, love, power, and violence in a searing indictment of patriarchal mores buried in these structures. It strips the idea of love as a veil behind which control, manipulation, and violence hide. The narrative unmask the often intangible, though highly impactful on the self and autonomy, ways in which emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse work: they do not scar physically but affect profoundly the person's sense of self and agency. The novel vividly narrates marriage as a political institution that enforces gender hierarchies and perpetuates systemic oppression, rather than a sacred

bond. The experience of the protagonist is an example of how violence is normalized within patriarchal frameworks, compelling women to endure abusive relationships under the guise of cultural and societal expectations. This is also a story of resistance. The protagonist is one who, from victimhood, comes to be empowered by writing as an act of self-expression and freedom.

The study further enhances the way Kandasamy masterfully employs a narrative style and literary devices. Fragmented storytelling, symbolism, and poetic language resemble the fractured psychological state of the protagonist while making the readers confront uncomfortable truths about gender dynamics. The novel criticizes the complicity of society in perpetuating the cycles of abuse by challenging the glorification of marriage as an institution. Its bold, unapologetic tone makes it a valuable contribution to feminist discourse, indeed compelling a retelling of long-held cultural norms.

Implications of the Study

This analysis makes a significant contribution to feminist literary criticism and gender and power studies. Through its examination of *When I Hit You*, the study illuminates the interface between personal narrative and structures of society and highlights how individual experiences of violence are embedded in the larger systems of patriarchy. It points out the significance of providing a voice to survivors of abuse and justifies the power of literature to speak out for marginalized voices. The feminist gaze challenges the novels in the conventional rendering of marriage and love, asking the reader to question and deconstruct the oppressive norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The study also enriches the postcolonial feminist discourse by situating the experiences of the protagonist within the postcolonial societies, where the cultural expectations often weigh more the honor of the family than that of the individual. The implications go further than any literary criticism but instead benefit scholars in the studies on gender, sociology, or cultural studies when looking toward understanding the more intricate forces of individual agency versus structured society.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can undertake comparative studies of *When I Hit You* and other feminist authors or works that critically analyze marriage and power. For example, a critical analysis of Kandasamy's novel along with authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Alice Walker, and Arundhati Roy may highlight the similarities and differences of the feminist critique of patriarchal institutions across cultures. Such studies would provide an international perspective on how marriages, love, and power are constructed and contested across various cultural and socio-political contexts.

A way of research into this domain may be cultural-specific characteristics of postcolonial feminism through

literature. In Kandasamy's account of the Indian sociocultural marriage framework, a much rich exploration of how the cultural specifics implicate and change gender roles is discovered. Future studies on regional, religious, and historical legacies and their roles in formulating oppression and resistance narratives might be explored. In addition, by combining literary analysis with inputs from sociology, psychology, and anthropology, the current understanding of personal trauma regarding collective cultural norms would be further enriched. Questions like these would take feminist scholarship further and advance the dialectic on gender, power, and resistance.

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Conflict of Interest

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