

A Socio-Psychological Study of Meena Kadnasamy's When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife

Aarti Kumari

Abstract: Kadnasamy's When I Hit You is a minute analysis of modern marriage. An unnamed narrator tells this story. She presents a misogynist husband, an embarrassed father with a possible divorce and a mother who asks the author to be silent advising her that time will pass and all her trouble will be forgotten. The narrator is a supporter of feminist ideology but still has to undergo through the pre-decided norms of Indian patriarchal society. She undergoes various types of pressure and agonies. The narrator's inner voice always expresses her inner emotion and psychological conflict. The present paper presents a critique of traditional value which creates a hinderance in progress of present woman. It also investigates oppression, suppression and self-determination of the protagonist as present woman. This study shows that contemporary Indian woman does not lead her life submissively, but strong enough to react judiciously. This signal is a radical transformation in modern Indian woman.

Keywords: Psychological conflict, Social-construct, inner voice, psychoanalysis, feminism.

Introduction: Meena Kadnasamy is an Indian poet, fiction writer, translator and activist. She has published two collection of poetry namely, Touch(2006) and Ms. Militancy(2010). Two of her poems have won accolades in all-India poetry competitions. She also has edited The Dalit, a Bi-monthly alternative English magazine of the Dalit media Network. As a writer, Meena's focus was mainly on caste annihilation, feminism and linguistic identity. Her fictions deal with caste, gender and how society works at ground level to put people into stereotypical roles. She also has faced threats for her fearless criticism of the Hindu society. She says, "This threat of violence shouldn't dictate what you are going to write or hinder in any manner."(Wikipedia)

Indian society is governed by traditional value. It is difficult for women to escape from their gendered role as mother, wife and daughter. Any attempt to transgress these roles results in isolation or self-destruction. Meena Kadnasamy moves in the depth of the psychological dimension. Her fiction projects difficulties faced by the narrator. We find the description of sensitive mind. Techniques like stream of consciousness, interior monologue, self-analysis pave the way to psychological realm. Through the narrator psyche, she discovers true significance of thing. This fiction focuses on intricacies and complexities of human relationship and moves around the theme of alienation and isolation. From a psychological perspective her fiction echoes the fundamentals of Indian society and socio-cultural ethos. The focus is on the status of woman in India in the male-oriented and male-defined social and moral codes. She portrays the narrator's quest of self-assertion and self-actualisation in the face of rigid norms of behavior in a confirmist husband and status-quo society.

The novel 'When I Hit you' is about a young wife who is an unnamed narrator. She falls in love with a man who was a college lecturer and marries him. After marriage she moves from Chennai to Mangalore, a new town where she is not allowed to talk in her mother tongue. She is confined to a place of three rooms and a veranda with limited access. she behaves according to her husband's wish like what to wear, what to talk and how to walk etc. She prepares her mind to play the part of the house wife, "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." In this process, her self-identity is lost. She feels like a house after robbery and made herself 'other'. Her husband was a communist. At first she was quite fascinated by his ideology but soon realized "Marriage became a recreation camp. He transformed into a teacher and I became the wife student learning from communist crusader."(When I Hit You, 32) A true communist behaves with his wife with respect not like narrator's husband who calls her whore and abuses her at home. In our society, to control woman to its end is seen as a prime factor in marriage by a man. In our society, gender inequality and cruel social practice make a woman sacrifice almost all her wishes. If a woman as wife stays in her husband house, she has to pay price through mental torture, working in home throughout the day and suffering domination. If she tries to consult her parents, she is consoled by her parents with words such as "Don't give him any ground for suspicion. Let us see how far he goes. Suspicion is the nature of man, it is the nature of love.....if he wants your world revolve around him make that happen."(When I Hit You,15) Private life is not allowed to woman. The narrator's husband snatches all rights of freedom and tries to see her as Indian traditional perfect wife.

The narrator is confined to four wall of her house and becomes compelled to lead a dependent life on her husband. Social norms are suppressive and try to make woman submissive. Sometimes a woman herself forgets how her nature would be with freedom. Yet an economic independent woman enjoys a certain kind of independence. but the narrator's husband does not allow her to do job because it is also seen as stigma or weakness of man if his wife goes outside to earn. A woman is allowed to go for job when husband remains unable to do work. The narrator's husband feels insecure and takes away her phone and tries to check her creativity in writing. The essay "A Room of One's Own" includes Woolf famous quote "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."(Woolf) The oppression and suppression of feeling are extensive in her marital life. Words like bitch, whore, slut turtures her day and night. She feels suffocation. Her marital life is full of violence. Though it was a love marriage, but gradually after marriage, she faces sick mentality of her husband. His true intolerable nature comes out. She becomes the object of oppression and her husband tries to tame her by abusing, torturing, beating and raping. Even sex with their wife becomes noiseless and elicits no movement from the woman. When the husband found that he could not control the space and the body of his wife, he started raping her in a nonsensical manner. The narrator describes it as "I never understood rape until it happened to me. It was a concept of savagery, of violence, of disrespect." This passive sex involved an attack on her soul and curtailed her freedom. He wanted to create a new identity as per his own wish. This was a psychological trauma she went through every day. Kadnasami depicts the inner world of sensibility and chaos inside the mind of the narrator. The psychological turmoil creates psychic imbalance. Unfortunately the marital rape is yet to be considered in India by the legal system. Our Indian

culture sanctions marriage as a legitimate space and gives the right to a husband over his wife's body, muting her voice. Consent and bodily integrity don't matter in a marriage.

In patriarchal society, parents remain silent even after knowing the truth due to the stigma of having a divorced daughter. When the narrator shares her truth of her marriage life with her father. He advises her not to raise voice "If you break off your marriage, everyone in town will mock me. They will say his daughter ran away in less than six months. It will reflect on your upbringing....You have no idea what a father goes through. A father of a daughter...that is a special kind of punishment. We pay a price.(When I Hit You, 46) Butler argues that "Our understanding of femininity is actually based on cultural interpretation rather than scientific examination. As a result, our perception of gender and sex are socially constructed or dictated to by what our societies think, say or portray to us."(social-contruction)

The intrusion of her husband in her personal life becomes intolerable. She feels losing her identity. Jackson, Toby calls this situation a kind of psychological violence, saying "compulsive masculinity is the reason for this psychological violence which tend to deny the prime role of women in society." The narrator goes through psychological trauma in this period of conjugal life. We can understand it better when she says "I see it is no longer fashionable to be mad, isn't it three inches of cleavage, two books of poetry, plenty of sex and depression-that's all it takes to make a woman famous writer."^{p.42} The narrator wanted to be a writer for social cause with her experience. But her husband hated her being a writer. He just wanted her to be confined to household work rather than writing. Private space of the writer became a matter of suspicion for her husband and she was not allowed to have it. Even her activities using Facebook, Gmail and phone calls to her parents were kept under surveillance. She was forced to uninstall the facebook account as her husband doesn't want her in social network with her friends and even with her parents. She suffers a great depression as she is programmed to turn into a submissive wife. It is clear that lack of love, trust and understanding leads towards a breakdown of the narrator's marriage.

Conclusion: In the end, we find the narrator breaking the image of the stereotypical woman depending on how you expect women to act and behave. The narrator possesses a defiant individuality and fights against this confirmity. The narrator walks out from this abusive marriage, becomes an independent woman and gain self- identity. I have chosen this work to analyse the effect of the traditional value system even in 21st century. Not much progress in thought is realised. Women life is still governed by cultural, historical and traditional value system, They are not free to lead their life on their own terms even after being educated. We can only hope to have them better access in future to what they wish to live their life.

Reference:

Kadnasamy, Meena. *When I Hit You: A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. New Delhi: Juggernaut. 4th ed. 2017.

<https://booksvoooks.com/scrolablehtml/when-i-hit-you-or-a-portrait-of-the-writer-as-a-young-wife-pdf.html?page=1>

<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/cultural-studies/social-construction-of-gender-cultural-studies-essay.php?vref=1>

Woolf, Virginia. "A Room of One's Own" Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015 p.23.

Bhattacharjee Partha and Priyanka Tripathi. "When a Violated Body Strikes/Writes Back: Unveiling the Violence in Meena Kadnasamy's When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" *The Atlantic Literary Review*. Vol.20, issue 2. April, 2019.

Kashyap, Tanu. "Feminist Study in Meena Kadnasamy's Novels When I Hit You or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" *Research journal of English Language and Literature*. Vol. 3. Issue3. 2018 (July-Sept.)

Selvi, Muthamil C. "Psychological Analysis of Female Character from Selected Novels of Anita Desai" *IJARnD*. Vol.2, Issue 8. 2017.

Kiruthika D. and Dr. S. Jeyalakshmi "The Unconventional Woman in Meena Kadnasamy's When I Hit you or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" *IJMDDR*. Vol. 5.1. Jan. 2019.

