



A Paradigm Shift in Women's Perception in Meena Kadnasamy's novel 'When I Hit You' or 'A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife'

Aarti Kumari

Abstract: The present paper is proposed to elaborate on and compare how female perception has undergone with a great change. It focuses on woman's changing perceptions. It is a minute analysis of modern marriage. The present study examines the perception of the modern women towards their role, and their interpretation of progress. The female issue is examined in relationship with social gender perception. It also deals with the problem of man and woman perception. Meena Kadnasamy's text 'When I Hit You' reflects a new aspect of woman's role, breaking the stereotype of man-woman relationships and how it creates a model of the modern woman.

Keywords: Fiction, perception, stereotype, status of woman, Role, Literature

The paper examines the paradigm shift in approaches to literature reading, understanding, and interpreting from humanist perception to poststructuralist assertions. The term humanities meant the study of art and literature. It is opposite of divinities that deal with religious texts and doctrines. Humanism is a perception that does not accept any explanation for existing phenomena if it is based on anything supernatural. It does not believe the world as being governed by a sort of divine being who is believed to be the source of reason for everything that happens in this world. Humans believe in the observation of senses by investigating and exercising of mind. The very perspective laid the foundation of science in the West. For the humanist, studying literature is important as it makes human being better inculcating human values and dilemmas that help them in understanding the human condition. Literature is reflection of life. We study different and changing perceptions with the tool of language.

From the time in our orthodox conservative Indian society, women are considered incapable of any serious thinking and action. More or less the same sort of perception and sex-stereotyping is expressed through language and literature. The portrayal of female characters like Draupadi, Kunti and Sita in the Indian epic reveals the attitude of society towards them. Early novelists like Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Kamla Markandaya, Mulkraj Anand, R.K. Narayan etc. also reveal the limited role of women in their work. women have been portrayed as being submissive, meek, gentle, docile, silent patient, and treated as the Other. As De Beauvoir observes, " She is not regarded as an autonomous being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to men...She is called the sex...He is the subject. He is the absolute, she is the other"(Adkali,101).

Earlier novels like 'Cry the Peacock' and 'Voices in the city' present depressed housewives. Maya in 'Cry the Peacock' turns insane and Monisha in 'Voices in the City' chooses death as her mode of escape. Such events are common while depicting middle-class households. Neither Maya nor Monisha attempts to find an alternative to their existence. The idea of venturing out in the outer world to obtain their economic independence which brings a sense of freedom and self-worth does not occur to them. Meena Kadnasamy does not allow her female protagonist to follow the traditional value system blindly. She attempts to make sense of herself out of her senseless position in a world which makes no sense. Though, sometimes the woman character seems to be caught within the hold of patriarchy with adapting herself to the need of man in her life. But at last, comes out of this trap and proves herself as Helen Cixous claims that to develop a self-affirming form of discourse, they must write their body and give voice to female sexuality. They must not trap themselves in male-identified language that reduces them to objects of production and reproduction. A meaningful subject for literary writing is the focus on the psychic fragmentation of the weaker sex. Psychotic rupture is perhaps the most repressive aspect of female subjectivity. The oppression of women is a psychological phenomenon that shows how man and woman perceive one another. Feminist scholarship undertakes to deconstruct the social construction of gender and all the subsidiary cultural paradigm that support feminist consciousness and perception have unveiled some of the prejudice at work in the traditional approaches to literature hitherto dominated by a masculine perspective. Woman's experiences of life as a member of society formulate her psyche.

With the change of time, literature is also revealing a different aspect of a woman. Now we find the daunting nature of the woman who knows what is right and what is wrong and acts judiciously. The female character in 'When I Hit You' is educated, cultured, modest, and strong enough to tolerate silently the unkind treatment meted out to her. But she walks out of her marriage when she realized the worthiness and meaninglessness of their marital relationship. Her patience leads her towards awakening and realization that the life she is gifted with is more precious than subservience.

The shifting paradigm in perception is a continuous process revealing their empowering status through the influence of education, economic freedom, and Western culture. Contemporary Indian writers successfully represent changing perceptions and images of women. Meena Kadnasamy 'When I Hit you' presents a painstaking experience of women across the world. She shows how women are subjected to abuse throughout the world and forced to remain silent within the four walls of the house. This book is an inspiration for every woman telling them how to cope up with life in face of violence, trauma, trouble and disruption. Through flashbacks Meena Kadnasamy speaks about her memory from childhood till now, her fruitless love relationship in University, her engagement with politics and her violent marriage etc. It is clearly visible in the text. "Here I am the actress, the self-anointed director, the cinematographer, and screenplay writer...the story changes every day, every hour, every single time. I sit and chart it out. The actors do not change, I cannot escape the set but with every shift in my perspective, a different story is born."(p. 36)

She suffers violence physical and mental. Meena Kadnasamy goes against society's norms while choosing her husband for marriage. The female protagonist of the novel shows her assertion in the matter of love marriage. She does not obey her parents blindly and shows her decisive power in the matter of marriage by marrying a man of her choice. In this matter she condemns the stereotype of male-based custom of a girl seeing practiced in Indian society. These customs are intended for judging a girl in order to assess her potential of being a possible bride to a man. The female protagonist marries a person of her choice going against the parents' will. She dreamed of a happy conjugal life. But she suffers brutal behaviour which is reflected in the following lines: "I must learn that a communist woman is treated equally and respectfully the comrades in public but can be slapped and called a whore behind the closed door." (p.25) These lines show that women are the worst sufferer even in the 21st century. We see how our female

protagonist suffers in mismatched marriage. Her husband tortures her physically and sexually. She feels like a fish out of water. She remains in the position of dilemma whether to stay there and withstand her misogynist husband or quit. She was threatened all the time imposing question after question:

Why does this man call you dearest? Why have you cleared the trash can in your email box? Why are there only nine telephone calls on the call log of your phone, whose number have you deleted? Why haven't you washed the sink? Why are you trying to kill me by trying to oversalt my food? Why can't you write as anonymous? Why did you not immediately reject the conference invitation when you bloody know that I'm not going to travel you alone(P.36)

When woman protagonist shares her sorrow about her husband suspicious nature with her mother, the protagonist's mother consoles her saying,

Don't give him any ground for suspicion, Let us see how far he goes. Suspicion is in the nature of men; it is the nature of love. He revolves around one question: What if she loves somebody else? It is a weak mind who comes up with these fears. Do not let him feel weak. If he wants your world to revolve around him, make that happen. He will grow tired of your attention and he will learn to give you space.(p. 37)

She also gives an account of various weapons he used to threaten her. She often feels repentant of her choice and feels further traumatised. She never thought such a newly married life was awaiting her. The writer has gone deep into the female psyche in her novels. She presents domestic violence and tries to portray the sensibility of a woman that how a woman looks out at herself and her problems. The writer gives a clear message that men and women are equal. Peaceful survival depends on mutual respect and understanding 'When I Hit you' goes against stereotypes by giving women voice and transcending the barrier of silence. The protagonist fights for her happiness as she is educated, and modern in her approach toward life and relationship. Mary Wollstoncraft argues in "The Vindication of Women's Rights" "Education is mandatory for all boys and girls. There must be public school system. She finally tells that "a future with educated women will be much brighter than a future without them"(Radha, 3)

The weak and innocent women are no longer exist. It is substituted by educated and strong women. Women have achieved many more things in all spheres of society. They are bold and independent. Men also have lately understood this fact as women are rapidly emerging and creating a new place for themselves in society. This new woman is constantly fighting with men to get her identity and equal rights. She is trying to change society. This change is taking place due to her hard work, dedication and conviction toward her duty in society. This new ideology we can see even in Meena Kadnasamy novel 'When I Hit you' when we find the protagonist saying

The marriage is oppressive and impossible as it does not have the power to hold me hostage forever. But if I were to be burdened with a child, I do not know how I could walk away. I anticipate my parents forcing me to stay with him for sake of society. I anticipate society asking me to stay with him for the sake of society. I anticipate society asking me to stay with him for the sake of the child, I anticipate my own child asking me to stay with him for the sake of family reputation. I can not have that happening.(p.115)

The image of women in fictions has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayal of self-sacrificing and enduring women to a woman searching for identity, no longer defined in terms of their victim status. Women have defied the concept of marriage and motherhood. In 'When I Hit You' the woman protagonist's husband wants to have a baby but she is not ready to have baby saying' "I don't want his baby.I can not bring a baby into a world in which I have no love. I do not want to bring into the world a son who will match his mother being beaten up, I do not want to bring into the world a daughter who will be beaten up."(p. 121) The protaogonist says that she is not a damsel in distress. She says further,"But I am not that. I am rough, gruff and tough...I am not afraid of men. I have fashioned myself in the defiant image of its exact, uncompromising opposite-the woman men are afraid of.I am anti-fragile. I've made been made not to break. That is one of the reasons why it becomes harder to talk about violence. Who I am proves to be my undoing."(p.131) The above lines show the woman protagonist's guts to face the worst situation. Though she suffers a lot in her married life, yet remains uncompromising. She does not yet yield before her husband violence. She acts in a way that she considers right.

Female literatures like 'When I Hit you 'promises woman view of life, women's experiences. Women writers' fictions have always been responsive to the change in material reality and theoretical perspective

that has impacted and governed. Earlier fictional works were concerned with downtrodden of the society, the middle class, and the suffering of women. But with time, we find a remarkable change in fiction all over the world. Now women fiction has become complex, vivid, and thematically richer. Writers have broadened their horizons of themes like trafficking, social health, and psychological issues. She has focused women's issues in this novel. She focuses on woman empowerment, the psychological pressure of women, and how to give them their own identity.

Conclusion: Indian society is structured in such a way as to perpetuate the subjugation of women. Women have been denied even basic rights like the right to education and the decisive power over her own life. She is still viewed as Other. She has been suffering issues like patriarchal family structure, the custom of polygamy, child marriage, the unequal share of property in the family, the purdah system, state of permanent widowhood etc. They are confined to the domestic sphere excluding from public discourse. Despite the constitutional safeguard, the situation is still unchanged to great extent. They still face ill-treatment, subjugation, and sexual assault. But nowadays we find a change in perception. Nowadays they perceive each and everything. They meditate on their position and try to change it. They are no longer silent figures having self effaced personalities. After getting education, they try to assert themselves in every field. As we the female protagonist of the novel shows her assertion in the matter of love marriage, her determination not having a baby in such contaminated atmosphere and finally her decision of leaving her husband.

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