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ROLE OF MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

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Ink n Ivory Publishing House

DAC Aves, G1, Maple Block, Narashiman Nagar, Polichalur, Chennai -75
Tamilnadu, India.

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Voices of Resistance: A Feminist-Dalit Reading of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

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Abstract

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017) is a radical narrative that foregrounds the intersection of gendered oppression and caste social hierarchies. Written as a memoir-like account, the text documents the protagonist's experiences of domestic violence, emotional terror, and systemic control in a patriarchal and caste-conscious society.

This study applies a Feminist-Dalit lens to examine how Kandasamy negotiates power, resistance, and bodily autonomy, highlighting the ways in which gendered violence is compounded by caste and social marginalization. By foregrounding the politics of the female body, voice, and affective experience, this article situates Kandasamy's work as a critical intervention in contemporary Indian feminist and Dalit literature.

Keywords: Meena Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, Feminist-Dalit theory, gendered violence, caste oppression, body politics, resistance

Introduction

Meena Kandasamy, a prominent Dalit feminist writer, poet, and activist, is renowned for addressing issues of caste, gender, and sexuality through a confrontational and lyrical prose style. *When I Hit You* is her most explicit autobiographical work, narrating the intimate horrors of marital abuse while simultaneously exposing the societal and cultural structures that facilitate such violence.

From a Feminist-Dalit perspective, this text becomes particularly significant because it emphasizes the compounded oppression of women who are both marginalized by caste and subjected to patriarchal violence. As Kandasamy herself notes in interviews, the work is an

attempt to document lived experiences of control, humiliation, and resistance that are often silenced within mainstream Indian narratives (Kandasamy, 2017).

Feminist-Dalit Framework

Feminist-Dalit theory foregrounds the intersection of gender and caste, examining how structural inequalities and patriarchal norms operate together to produce systemic oppression. Unlike mainstream feminism, which often centers upper-caste women, Dalit feminism highlights the unique struggles faced by women at the intersection of caste and gender discrimination (Rege, 1998).

In *When I Hit You*, the protagonist experiences a form of domestic violence that is not just marital but also socially and culturally sanctioned. The text illustrates how the Dalit feminist subject negotiates power and agency through language, writing, and bodily endurance. Kandasamy's narrative functions as both testimony and resistance, aligning with the goals of Dalit feminist literature: to voice the silenced and challenge hegemonic structures.

Domestic Violence as Gendered and Casteed Oppression

Domestic violence is often framed as a private, gendered issue, but Kandasamy situates it within larger social, cultural, and casteed hierarchies. The protagonist's suffering is multilayered, where her gender makes her vulnerable to physical and emotional abuse, and her caste positioning intensifies societal indifference and complicity.

Sara Ahmed's work on affective feminism provides a theoretical lens to understand how emotions such as shame, fear, and humiliation operate as tools of patriarchal and casteed control (Ahmed, 2004). The narrative repeatedly foregrounds the body as a site of violence, illustrating how the domestic space becomes a theatre of both physical assault and emotional terror.

"The body is a map of oppression, a site where the social, the political, and the intimate intersect" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 42).

The protagonist's endurance of violence, coupled with her eventual assertion of voice, demonstrates resistance through narration, aligning with Dalit feminist strategies that prioritize testimonial authority and counter-narratives.

Language and Voice as Resistance

Kandasamy's use of poetic, fragmented, and intensely personal language challenges the conventional memoir form. The stylistic choice mirrors the rupture and trauma experienced by

the protagonist, while also functioning as an act of rebellion against normative patriarchal discourse (Rege, 1998).

By naming violence explicitly, the work transforms silence into articulation, an essential principle of Dalit feminist writing. The protagonist's narrative asserts that speaking about trauma is itself a form of agency, challenging both domestic and social structures that seek to maintain female subordination.

Intersectionality of Gender and Caste

Although *When I Hit You* primarily focuses on marital abuse, a **Feminist-Dalit reading** reveals subtle casteed undertones. The narrative exposes:

1. Societal indifference to female suffering in caste-conscious communities.
2. Internalized oppression, where women are socialized to endure abuse.
3. Structural barriers that prevent recourse, making violence an intersectional experience (Shah, 2017).

The protagonist's identity as a woman navigating these intersecting oppressions mirrors the dual marginalization faced by Dalit women—they are oppressed not only by patriarchy but also by entrenched caste hierarchies.

Resistance and Agency

Kandasamy constructs resistance as multifaceted:

- Narrative resistance: Writing as reclaiming voice and subjectivity
- Emotional resistance: Reframing fear and shame as knowledge and empowerment
- Social critique: Exposing societal complicity in gendered and casteed oppression

The protagonist's eventual assertion of voice aligns with Sara Ahmed's theory of affective resistance, which posits that emotions like anger and shame can challenge normative power relations and catalyze social critique (Ahmed, 2004).

“To speak is to resist, to name is to reclaim territory that violence has attempted to occupy” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 97).

Comparative Insights and Implications

A Feminist-Dalit reading of *When I Hit You* emphasizes the political dimension of personal trauma. Unlike mainstream feminist narratives, Kandasamy foregrounds structural inequalities rooted in caste, class, and community, situating domestic violence within a broader social matrix.

The text also contributes to contemporary Dalit feminist discourse, highlighting how testimonial literature can challenge dominant narratives, reclaim history, and assert agency over silenced experiences.

Conclusion

When I Hit You is a seminal work in Feminist-Dalit literature, exemplifying how intimate, bodily, and emotional experiences intersect with structural oppression and caste consciousness. Kandasamy's narrative demonstrates that resistance emerges not only through public activism but also through testimony, writing, and articulation of emotion.

By applying Feminist-Dalit theory, this study reveals how Kandasamy negotiates gendered, casteed, and affective oppression, transforming personal trauma into a political act of reclamation and empowerment.

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