

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MARRIAGE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT.

India is traditionally a patriarchal country where women have always been given a secondary treatment. Women in India have always been treated shabbily and badly. They are always considered a weaker sex created to serve the men. They are always considered a worthless burden for their family. They have been various discriminations because of their sex. The headlines of every day newspaper bring the news of various discriminations meted out to women- eve teasing, female foeticide, dowry deaths and domestic violence. One of the major problems among these is the domestic violence against women. Domestic violence refers to the violence faced by the women within the realm of their homes. Within the four walls of their house, Indian women face various types of violence and abuses like physical abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse and even financial abuse. This paper analyses the domestic violence within a marriage with reference to Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*. *When I Hit You* portrays the character of a writer who faces the various forms of domestic violence after her marriage. It focuses on the various struggles she faced in her marriage and the after-effects of walking out of an abusive marriage. As literature has the power to influence society, this paper aims to spread awareness among the society about the evils of domestic violence and urges them to take steps to curb this evil.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Marriage, Women, Torture, Literature*

Domestic violence has become a bitter truth in today's society. And a major cause of this is the orthodox mentality of the society. In a patriarchal society like India, women are always considered weaker and lower than men. They are always assigned a secondary position. The irony in this case is that the Indians who worship Maa Durga as a symbol of power, treats the women of their own country as inferior and subservient to the men. This thinking leads to various gender discriminations and injustices towards women. Women become victims to various atrocities, and one of these extremely cruel acts that Indian women have been facing since a long time is domestic violence in a marriage. In a patriarchal society, marriage is considered a holy sacrament where the wife is expected to consider her husband as a 'parmeswara' or a God. She is expected to remain within the four walls of her house, remain faithful and obedient to her husband, should be meek, docile and subservient, should not argue with her husband and should always follow her husband's order. In many cases, refusing for sex and infertility leads to physical and sexual forms of violence. Dowry system also leads to domestic violence against women. The problem in Indian society is that the societal pressures to make a marriage work generally forces women to suffer silently. They are asked to adjust even in the worst situations and are advised that time will heal everything. No one understands the emotional and psychological storms that a woman is facing along with the physical torture. In the words of Rebecca J. Burns, "When I am asked why a woman doesn't leave abuser I say: Women stay because the fear of leaving is greater than the fear of staying."

They will leave when the fear of staying is greater than the fear of leaving.” A common Indian house wife has a tendency to bear the harassment she is subjected to by her husband and the family. One reason could be to prevent the children from undergoing the hardships if she separates from the spouse. Also the traditional and orthodox mindset makes them bear the sufferings without any protest. Other forms of physical abuse against women include slapping, punching, grabbing, burdening them with drudgery, public humiliation and the neglect of their health problems. Some of the other forms of psychological torment against them could be curtailment of their rights to self-expression and curbing the freedom to associate with the natal family and friends (youthkiwaaz.com).

Meena Kandasamy, in her book *When I Hit You*, presents the struggles of a young aspiring writer in an abusive marriage, where she faced physical torture, emotional abuse, mental trauma, social humiliation and isolation. Not only this but the aftermaths of walking out a marriage that she had to face was equally difficult to enShe tried to portray how society pressures forces women to endure the various forms of domestic violence to make a marriage work and how women in fear of social humiliation suffers silently within the four walls of their house.

The story focuses on the struggles of a young writer who after many failed relationships married a man who she felt will anchor the boat of her life. He was “perfect husband-material in the eyes of my parents” (Kandasamy 44). But destiny had other plans for her. After their marriage she moved with him to Mangalore. He always doubted her. He didn't allow her to socialise. The first step he took was that he forced her to deactivate her Facebook account as he felt using Facebook means wasting time unnecessarily. But for her, it was not just a means of social media but a medium to promote her work, remain connected with the literary realm and a way to have an online presence which was necessary in a world of freelancing. Her husband was aware of that. “He knows that my being a writer involves being at the mercy of others, being visible, being remembered at the right time so that someone throws the opportunity my way. In my precarious situation, when he wants to cut myself off from Facebook, I know that it is an act of career suicide” (Kandasamy 52). But as his blackmails increased, she was forced to deactivate her account. But it was just the beginning. Next he asked her to write all the passwords of her email accounts and she had to comply with this demand. When she shared this with her mother on phone, her mother advised her to adjust. She said, “Don't give him any ground for suspicion. Suspicion is in the nature of men; it is in the nature of love. 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. The more you try to stake your claim to privacy, the more he will assume that you are hiding things from him and forging a secret life for himself” (Kandasamy 56).

Next came the turn of her phone. He asked her to change her old number and gave her a local SIM card and he instructed her that she was not allowed to share the number with anyone else except her parents. Next she was told that she can use internet only in his presence and that only three hours a week. She realized that “it would kill her as a writer” (Kandasamy 59) but even her parents supported him in this prohibition. She had no other option and she had to agree to this prohibition as well. Sometimes she felt a voice inside her head say to her to walk out of this marriage. But then there were the societal pressures that women in India have been brought up with. She also faced the same dilemmas- “How you know the world will laugh at you for a month-long marriage. Even that is not as cruel as the sight of the sad faces of your parents. Disgraced. You have given them nothing but disappointment. The defeat they will carry in their eyes for the rest of their days. Never again the old pride. Never again the easy trust. Never again will the way they say your name be the same. No more will they carry their dreams on your shoulder” (Kandasamy 61). Thinking all these made her think twice before taking any decision. She was stuck choosing between “Fight and Flight. I haven't given up fighting, not yet. The flight only comes when the fight has failed”, she thought (Kandasamy 61).

These were just the beginning as her worst night mares became reality when he started torturing her physically. “Trying to recollect the first time I was hit by my husband, there's only hot glass tears and the enduring fear of how often it has come to pass. The reconstruction of the events does not help. It always begins with a silly accusation, my denial, an argument, and along the road, the verbal clash cascades into a torrent of blows....-sometimes his bones of contention are so thin that they make me wonder if any accusation is only a ruse and excuse to hit me. I do not have anyone I can talk to about what is going on behind these closed doors” (Kandasamy 69). He used anything that he found in the house to hit her like the cord of her Mac-Book, the back of the broomstick, his brown leather belt, broken ceramic plates and even the drain hose of the washing machine. She never had even the slightest idea that “this was the exemplary life awaiting a newly married woman” (Kandasamy, 70). He didn't have anything as much as he hated a middle-class woman writer and hence he never gave her the scope to take any writing assignments after marriage. “The common, widely held opinion is that writers dig the ruins, scour the past, and always puts themselves there. My husband is railing at me, slapping me, throwing my laptop across the small kitchen, forcing me to delete a manuscript, a non-fiction book-in-progress, because somewhere in its pages there is a mention of the word lover. He accuses me of carrying my past into our present, and this treason is evidence enough that there is no hope or space for the future to flourish” (Kandasamy 87).

He deleted all her emails from her inbox to set her free from the burdens of memories of her past, at least that's what he felt. He even changed her password so that she won't be able to write to the helpdesk to restore the mails. Everything that made her identity as a writer was gone- all her contacts, her drafts, her letters everything vanished all at one go. That's how as time passed "the once-upon-a-time fiery feminist becomes a battered wife" (Kandasamy 144). Then he started abusing her mentally. He calls her mad and sometimes even calls her someone obsessed with depression. He even accuses that she is being controlled by some demon that is eating up the obedience inside her. Just as witch-doctors whip the possessed woman with bunches of neem leaves till the demon leaves the body, similarly her husband used the Mac's power-cord, his leather belt and twisted electrical cables to whip her so that the demon will leave and she will become the obedient wife he expected her to be. "When he hits me, terror flows from the fear that today he uses his bare hands, tomorrow he could wield a heavy buckled belt, he could grab an iron rod, he could throw a chair, that he could break open my head against a wall. Every day, I inch closer to death, to being killed, to the fear that I will end up in a fight whose result I cannot reverse" (Kandasamy 155).

When she told her parents of the violence that she was facing, her father said her that it happens everywhere. She should listen to him and should not argue with him as if she will argue things will only worsen. She should remain silent as that is the only way to improve things. She followed their advice. At first he enjoyed her silence as a sign of his victory but then again he got irritated by her silence and started torturing her more accusing her that she is silently thinking about her ex-lovers. He kicked her stomach, dragged her by her hairs inside her bedroom and raped her, calling her a bitch and saying that it will be a lesson that she will never forget. "I never understood rape until it happened to me. It was a concept- of savagery, of violence, of violation, of disrespect" (Kandasamy 167). "Sex, actually rape, becomes his weapon to tame me." (Kandasamy 168). "A rape is a defeat. A rape is also a punishment. Sometimes, the punishment for saying no. Sometimes, the punishment for a long-ago love story. In Tamil culture, menstruation pollutes the body for a period of three days. After childbirth, the body remains polluted for eleven days; and for the death of a blood relative, we are considered soiled for sixteen days. For sex with another man before marriage, a husband considers his wife polluted for a lifetime. A body that is considered polluted can be punished as a man pleases. That is the philosophy of caste that is the philosophy of my rape (Kandasamy 170). Then rapes became a regular incident for her.

Then he started forcing her to have a child so that she can never even think of leaving him. He took her to doctors and asked them to treat her so that she can give him a child. One day when they have an argument he tries to "hoist me up against the wall, holding by my neck alone. "He shouts at and screams at me as he pins me to the floor of the living room, but I no longer hear him. He is holding my face down with his foot, his toes digging into my cheeks, stamping on my ears. This is how he demands my silence" (Kandasamy 212). When she almost felt death approaching her, she decided to walk out. She took whatever she needed- her ATM card, her passport, her phone and laptop and left. After walking out of a marriage, she faced a lot of problems and humiliation as she wrote an article for a magazine about this and people started accusing her of spreading a wrong story abuse. They questioned her that if she was being abused then why was she suffering silently for these four months? She filed a case against her but it also yielded no results. But she let the words she wrote to help her escape from the harsh realities. "Words give birth to another woman" (Kandasamy 241).

Using the story of this young writer, Meena Kandasamy wants reach to every woman who is suffering silently, whose reputation is being tarnished, who is trapped in a marriage, who is being tortured physically, emotionally, mentally and financially, who is expected to play the role of a submissive and obedient wife and who is facing marital rape. It is a way to motivate them to stop living such a difficult life and to take a stand for themselves, to put a fight for their self-respect and to lead a better life.

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