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Literary Theories

Feminist Resistance and Cultural Silencing in Meena Kandasamy's When I Hit You

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Abstract: This article explores the intersections of domestic violence, marital oppression, cultural silencing, and creative agency in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, an auto fictional. It deals with women's suppression in the educated families of patriarchal society. The novel exposes the normality of patriarchal violence and is sustained through cultural norms surrounding marriage, obedience, and female endurance rather than representing the psychological abuse. A Qualitative feminist cultural framework is used to analyses how gendered violence is legitimized through culture, while resistance emerges through narrative voices and writings. Domestic violence is a part of Meena Kandasamys *When I Hit You* and it is something that women face every day in patriarchal society. This framework focuses on the transition of the protagonist from a victim of cultural silencing to an agent of feminist resistance. When we look at the story using ideas from women's rights and how culture works, we can see that the writer is taking back control over their life and story. By analyzing the text through feminist theory and cultural studies, this research argues that the narratives of the author reclaim "Writerly Self" as political sovereignty, and it undermines the sacredness of the dominant patriarchal society. It portrays marriage as a culture that enables control over women's bodies and creativity. The act of writing becomes a form of feminist resistance that challenges the cultural narratives of womanhood and marital sanctity.

Keywords: Feminist Resistance, Cultural Silencing, Autofiction, Patriarchal Violence, Qualitative Analysis.

Introduction

In contemporary Indian writing in English literature, narratives of fiction have focused more on women's resistance and gender inequality. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* portrays the abuse of women by men in the name of marriage, which brings the critique of patriarchal culture followed in society. The novel brings the experience of an unnamed woman who marries a Marxist university lecturer, and later gets trapped in an abusive marriage. It portrayed how patriarchal cultural expectations have suppressed women with silence and endurance. Men's authority is reinforced by ideological domination and emotional manipulation in patriarchal society. This novel treats domestic violence as the abuse of cultural and social structures in the patriarchal society rather than a private tragedy. It critiques the normalization of cultural violence against women in the society and brings writing as an agency of resistance among women. It examines the silencing of women's voices through ages in the name of culture. It represents the world in the name of fascist control which exposes the unspoken and bitter experiences of women.

Meena Kandasamy in her work "When I Hit You or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" gives the portrayal of 21st century Indian women and their thirst of identity. She writes, 'I am the woman at whom society cannot spit or throw stones because this me is a she who is made up only of words on a page, and the lines she speaks are those that everyone hears in their own voice' (Meena, *When I...*, P.246). In one of her interviews, "And the more familiar the strange becomes the more and more strange the familiar appears. That's how the once upon a time fiery feminism becomes a battered wife. By observing but not doing anything by experiencing but not understanding. By recording but not judging" (Kandasamy). It highlights the fight of protagonist for autonomy. It offers wide reflections of women struggle in Indian society who are imprisoned in repressive patriarchal systems for ages.

Literature review

Jonathan McAloon (2018) states that Meena Kandasamy's "When I Hit You" is worth reading. The protagonist of the novel writes letter and in the act of writing she finds consolation. Meanwhile writing letters to unknown friends is not safe. When the trauma of the protagonist becomes chronic, she has to develop other behavioural activities to overcome it (McAloon, 2018). Niranjan Majhi (2018) comments that "When I Hit You" made him feel fun as the story goes on. The protagonist of the novel is aware of her husband's extramarital affair. She chooses silence over resilience. The narrator states that the protagonist's father has taught her that being silent is the best solution for any problem. Being silent made her anger even worse. Initially, the story portrays the victim of domestic violence, and as the story progresses, it brings out the trauma and its effects of her writing. (Majhi, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

A qualitative feminist cultural framework is used with Feminist literary theory and cultural studies. Simone de Beauvoir and other critics of feminism contend that women are considered as "other" as socially constituted (de Beauvoir 301). Raymond Williams describes culture as "whole way of life" (Williams 57). Chandra Talpade Mohanty emphasizes how the cultural narratives have honoured the women's slavery particularly in non-western societies (Mohanty 22). With this close reading of the text *When I Hit You* culture serves as a tool for authority in the name of patriarchy.

Marriage as a Cultural Violence

According to De Beauvoir, women become dependent on male power in the name of marriage for ages (445). In *When I Hit You*, the art of writing and thinking of the protagonist is methodologically eliminated. In this male-dominated society, the husband's discourse in the novel upholds cultural legitimacy. The power is given to husband which strengthens his dominance while female is situated with the name of responsibility. Marriage links male with dominance and female with dependency. It is not mutually accepted partnership rather it is culturally accepted dominance. Meena Kandasamy in her novel explains how the culture promote abuse in the name of marriage upheld by family, society and silence.

Normalization of Domestic Violence through Culture

The novel's cultural narratives turn perseverance as moral duty of women in the patriarchal society. Kate Millett claims that patriarchy flourishes by normalizing dominance is especially pertinent (Millett 25). The protagonist's sufferings are considered as her character test rather than injustice. Stuart Hall refers as ideological invisibility, which states that power functions best when it is unchallenged (Hall 41). This ideology shows domestic abuse that is prevailing in the patriarchal society. The protagonist's exclusion is not a chance given to her rather it's the result of culture.

Silencing and Control of the Female Voice

Gayathri Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak" brings a powerful insight to this novel. The silencing of women in the society is the outcome of cultural patriarchy which is prevailing in the society. The concept of "good wife" is to remain silent. The voice of the protagonist is constantly delegitimized by her husband. Language is also an barrier to express their views and sufferings. Therefore, the women's resistance is repressed where the men got control over them. The protagonist's husband suppressed her from speaking, writing or even voicing out for herself. This novel is the portrayal of dominated society where the cultural patriarchy is operated by "Silencing" of women in the society.

Writing as Cultural and Feminist Resistance

The protagonist's act of writing represents her quest for survival and also the resistance. She challenged the limitations of the patriarchal society by narrating her own experience. Writing becomes a counter cultural practice which challenges the norms of silence of a woman. The self-reflection of author's tone in the novel depicts the political testimony which is transformed from the personal suffering. Leigh Gilmore states that the autobiographical writing of women often challenges dominant cultural scripts by asserting experiential truth (Gilmore 6). The novel destabilizes the assumptions of cultural myths on marriage, discipline and honour which is prevailing in the patriarchal society; therefore, this novel becomes an act of feminist intervention.

Conclusion

Through the lens of Qualitative feminist cultural framework this novel brings out the patriarchal violence in the name of culture. It's a critique of how the culture has repressed the women in the patriarchal society by silencing them. Rather exposing it as an individual suffering the novelist portrays it as a social injustice. From her writing the author breaks the cultural silence of the women which shifts the individual tragedy into collective resistance. So, this novel stands significant for feminist literature with dismantles the cultural narratives and norms that is prevailing in the society. It's an ongoing struggle for women's rights within repressive patriarchal structures. This novel is the depiction of women whom refused to disappear rather than beaten. Instead of being erased the protagonist chooses to voice out for herself. By giving the voice to the sufferings of women, Kandasamy reclaims literature as a space for their writing. The protagonist of the novel attends a therapy where she is not cured. She questions herself, starts to live with the memory and continues to write. The victory lies on her survival and vocalization herself rather than being broken.

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