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Constructing Silence, Reclaiming Voice: Gendered Subjectivity in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

TGP. Priyadharsini*
Department of Language, Culture, and Society, College of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur – 603 203, Chengalpattu (District), Tamil Nadu, India

S. Mahadevan
Department of Language, Culture, and Society, College of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur – 603 203, Chengalpattu (District), Tamil Nadu, India

N. Sheik Hameed
Department of English, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, 120 Seethakathi Estate, Grand Southern Trunk Road, Vandalur, Tamil Nadu – 600048, India

V. UmaMaheswari
Research Department of English, A.D.M. College for Women (Autonomous) (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Thiruchirappalli), Nagapattinam-611001, Tamil Nadu, India

S. Karthikumar
Department of English, Annamalai University, College Road, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram-608002, Tamil Nadu, India

***Abstract*—This paper offers a critical reading of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer* as a Young Wife through the dual frameworks of social constructionism and postcolonial feminist theory. Often classified as a testimonial narrative of domestic abuse, the novel is reinterpreted here as a trenchant critique of the ideological structures—marriage, nationhood, and language—that construct and constrain female subjectivity in postcolonial India. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's theory of social reality and Judith Butler's concept of performativity, the study examines how patriarchal power operates not only through physical violence but also through discursive conditioning that enforces silence, obedience, and moral surveillance. The protagonist's enforced roles as dutiful wife, cultural custodian, and symbol of familial honor are shown to be socially fabricated performances, normalized through repetition and coercion. Further, engaging with postcolonial feminist thinkers such as Mohanty and Spivak, the paper contends that the narrator's acts of writing, refusal to name her abuser, and narrative self-reclamation constitute epistemic resistance. Through language, she contests the very structures that sought to silence her. *When I Hit You* is ultimately a radical narrative of reconstruction, where the female subject dismantles socially inscribed roles and reclaims agency through storytelling.**

***Index Terms*—social constructionism, postcolonial feminism, gendered subjectivity, patriarchy, narrative agency**

I. Introduction

Meena Kandasamy's narrative is a fierce indictment of marriage and nationhood's ideological violence in a society that values silence and suffering. Her *When I Hit You* is a contemporary Indian English novel that provocatively straddles the line between fiction and autobiography. While it is often read as a testimony of domestic abuse, the novel also functions as a meta-narrative reflection on the act of writing itself, exploring how fiction and stories can provide an escape and become an act of defiance (Kandasamy, 2020). As the subtitle suggests, the novel explores how fiction and stories can help in acts of defiance and self-reclamation through narrative (Kandasamy, 2020). Kandasamy dissects her marriage and life choices, offering a courageous and disturbing account of resistance and self-reclamation through narrative. Her critical view of social structures and power dynamics is shaped by her identities as a Dalit, feminist, and Marxist. Her work addresses caste, gender, and class oppression of Dalit women. Kandasamy uses narrative to fight social silencing

* Corresponding Author. Email: tgppriyadharsini@gmail.com

and challenge patriarchal norms. She critiques the ideological violence of marriage and nationhood and shows how language and narrative can subvert socially constructed silences.

When I Hit You poignantly centers on the protagonist's struggle against the erasure of her identity within a repressive marital and social structure. The novel intricately portrays how patriarchal norms and societal expectations contribute to the silencing of women, confining them to prescribed roles (Bennett & Royle, 2016). More than just depicting physical abuse, Kandasamy's narrative exposes the systematic dismantling of the protagonist's sense of self as she is coerced into conforming to the image of a dutiful wife (Ashley et al., 1994). As such, the protagonist's journey becomes a powerful act of resistance as she reclaims her voice and re-authors her story (Amoussou, 2021), challenging the structures that seek to define and confine her (Ashley et al., 1994).

This paper addresses the research problem of how female identity is not simply repressed but actively constructed within coercive structures. Specifically, it investigates how the ideological forces of marriage, patriarchy, and postcolonial nationhood shape the protagonist's subjectivity in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*. Moving beyond a surface-level understanding of domestic abuse, this approach explores the more profound, systemic ways in which women are conditioned to internalize and perform specific roles (Nayar, 2010). The rationale for this study lies in the urgent need to understand the insidious nature of these power dynamics and how they contribute to the silencing and erasure of female voices (Golley, 2010). By examining the protagonist's experiences through an inter sectional lens, the paper aims to shed light on the complex interplay of gender, caste, and societal expectations in shaping women's lives in contemporary India (Amin et al., 2020; Ellis, 2021).

The central argument of this paper asserts that *When I Hit You* is not merely a personal narrative of abuse but a carefully constructed critique of the socio-political forces that shape gendered subjectivity in contemporary India. It argues that the protagonist's journey from silence to voice is a form of epistemic resistance against patriarchal and postcolonial structures that seek to define and confine her. The protagonist's acts of reclaiming her narrative, refusing to name her abuser, and challenging societal expectations all serve as strategic tools to subvert the dominant discourse (Bose, 2020). The novel demonstrates that the protagonist's writing becomes a means of reshaping herself and challenging the social constructs that attempt to silence her (Bose, 2020).

This paper claims that *When I Hit You* is a precise critique of the socio-political forces that shape gendered subjectivity in modern India, not just a personal account of abuse. From silence to voice, the protagonist resists patriarchal and postcolonial structures that define and confine her, it claims. The protagonist subverts the dominant discourse by reclaiming her narrative, refusing to name her abuser, and challenging social norms (Bose, 2020). The novel shows how the protagonist's writing transforms her and challenges social constructs that silence her (Bose, 2020).

Understanding writing as a site of resistance (Amoussou, 2021) against social silence and submission (Karkaba, 2010) is crucial. Writing helps the protagonist reclaim her narrative and challenge the dominant discourses that define her (Schneider, 2010). This research shows how marginalized people can use creative expression to subvert oppressive structures and assert their agency (Golley, 2010), turning personal experiences into political defiance.

When I Hit You documents the social construction of the female subject in patriarchal and nationalist discourses in postcolonial India, proposing writing as a subversive act that reclaims agency and identity. This paper will show how the protagonist's domestic abuse is part of a larger system of oppression rooted in societal norms and power imbalances by closely reading the novel (Srivastava, 2016). Thus, writing helps the protagonist resist these forces, reclaim her voice, and define herself (Amoussou, 2021).

This analysis will utilize Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social constructionist framework to understand how humans create, institutionalize, and traditionalize social phenomena such as gender roles and identities. Judith Butler's concept of performativity will be employed to demonstrate how gender is a performance enacted through repeated social interactions and discourses (Funk & Benhabib, 1994). This framework will allow us to examine how marriage, family, and nationhood in India shape the protagonist's identity (Ghosh, 2018).

Postcolonial Feminist Theory, by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, will be used to examine how global and national patriarchies intersect with localised gender oppression in postcolonial India (Rajan, 1993). This theoretical lens will illuminate how colonialism continues to shape gender dynamics and power relations, particularly in the context of marriage and family (Hussain & Hussein, 2019). The paper employs these theoretical frameworks to examine the intricate forces that shape female subjectivity in *When I Hit You* and how writing can serve as a powerful form of resistance.

II. Literature Review

A. Critical Reception of the Novel

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* has garnered attention for its exploration of liberal feminist themes (Sangeetha et al., 2022). The novel aligns with liberal feminism's emphasis on individualism and equal rights within a liberal democracy, as it portrays the protagonist's journey from a submissive to a self-liberated individual (Sangeetha et al., 2022). Liberal feminism, which has roots in the Enlightenment, champions women's rights through political participation, education, and equal opportunities (Mahawar, 2022). By depicting the protagonist's struggle against patriarchal constraints and her pursuit of autonomy, Kandasamy's work resonates with central tenets of liberal feminism, highlighting the importance of individual agency and the dismantling of gender-based inequalities (Miskiyah & Sofyan, 2023).

Recent research has illuminated the complexities of abuse in *When I Hit You*. Rashed and Rasheed's (2024) paper examines Stockholm syndrome and the cycle of abuse in the novel, highlighting literature's ability to reveal abusive relationships' psychological effects. They examine the protagonist's tension-building, battering, and reconciliation, a cycle that traps victims. The protagonist's decision to stay in the abusive relationship is complicated by love, shame, and societal pressures, according to the study. The psychological aspects of domestic violence in Kandasamy's work are enhanced by this perspective, complementing literary analyses (Rashed & Rasheed, 2024).

The "post-truth" of toxic masculinity in leftist circles adds another critical dimension to Kundu's (2023) *When I Hit You* analysis. Kundu believes the novel shows how leftist men can promote toxic masculinity while claiming progressive values. The paper uses #MeToo to challenge the idea that the left is less sexist, showing its structural fragility in gender equality claims. Kundu uses Judith Butler and George L. Mosse to argue that Kandasamy's novel is essential for examining masculinity in leftist politics and emphasizing the need for self-reflection and accountability (Kundu, 2023).

Sridevi's (2024) "Feminist Struggles in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*: Resisting Patriarch" examines the novel's critique of patriarchy and the promotion of female autonomy. Kandasamy's compelling first-person narrative exposes gender-based oppression and challenges silence-promoting norms, according to the study. It also examines the intersections of gender, caste, and class to understand the protagonist's fight for independence. Sridevi T's analysis emphasizes women's unity against patriarchal violence and suggests that collective storytelling and shared experiences can fight oppression. This perspective enhances literary analyses of Kandasamy's feminist themes (Sridevi, 2024).

B. Theoretical Precedents

(a). Social Constructivism in Literature

Social constructionism helps explain how identities are formed in specific social and cultural contexts. It claims that "reality" and "truth" are social constructs based on interactions and shared meanings (Golley, 2010). In literary studies, this perspective has helped deconstruct essentialist notions of identity, which assume fixed and inherent characteristics based on gender, race, or class. Social constructionism emphasizes how language, discourse, and social practices shape identity, making it fluid and malleable.

Social constructionist literary scholars study how narratives shape characters' identities. This involves examining how social norms, power dynamics, and cultural expectations influence self-perception. A constructionist reading might examine how female characters in a novel internalize or resist dominant gender roles, or how colonialism and discrimination shape racial identities (Oloruntoba–Oju & Oloruntoba–Oju, 2013). We can gain a more profound understanding of how literature reflects and challenges social identity through this approach.

(b). Criticizing Universalism and Highlighting Localities

Western universalist feminism has been accused of imposing its cultural values and experiences on women in former colonies (Golley, 2010). Postcolonial feminism responds. Universalist feminism often labels women as "woman," ignoring their diverse realities and unique challenges in different cultural and historical contexts (Teke, 2013). Postcolonial feminists believe gender constructs are deeply rooted in colonialism and postcolonial societies.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Mohanty have criticized Western feminists for treating "Third World women" as a homogenous group, ignoring class, caste, ethnicity, and religion (Golley, 2010). Postcolonial feminism emphasizes understanding how colonialism has shaped gender relations in specific local contexts, resulting in unique oppression and resistance. This involves studying how colonial powers imposed gender norms and hierarchies, thereby disrupting social structures and creating new forms of inequality (Oloruntoba–Oju & Oloruntoba–Oju, 2013).

Additionally, postcolonial feminism recognizes the importance of local knowledge and agency in challenging patriarchal structures. It promotes the perspectives and empowerment strategies of former colonial women. Postcolonial feminism provides a more nuanced and culturally sensitive understanding of gender, power, and identity in postcolonial literature and societies by emphasizing localized gender constructs (Mtairi, 2019).

C. Research Gap

While much critical attention has been directed toward the testimonial aspects and trauma narrative within Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*, a significant research gap exists concerning the intricate interplay between constructionist theory and postcolonial feminist analysis in deciphering the novel's portrayal of power dynamics. Existing scholarship often highlights the protagonist's suffering and resilience, framing the narrative as a personal account of abuse and survival (Paul, 2021; Sangeetha et al., 2022). However, few studies examine how the novel elucidates the ways in which power, particularly within the context of a patriarchal and potentially caste-influenced society, actively constructs and deconstructs subjectivity. A constructionist lens would enable an examination of how societal norms, gender roles, and cultural expectations are not merely external forces acting upon the individual but rather constitutive elements that shape the protagonist's very sense of self. Simultaneously, a postcolonial feminist perspective is crucial for understanding how these power dynamics are further complicated by the legacy of colonialism and its impact on gender relations within the Indian context (Ashcroft et al., 2003). Examining the intersection of these theoretical frameworks would reveal a more nuanced understanding of how the protagonist's subjectivity is both a product of and a site of resistance against multifaceted power structures (Srivastava, 2016). Furthermore, such an analysis could explore how the protagonist's

narrative choices and acts of self-definition challenge and subvert these imposed constructions, thereby highlighting the potential for agency and transformation (Zaidi et al., 2022).

III. The Social Construction of Silence and Obedience

When studying silence and obedience in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*, it's important to remember that social and cultural forces shape these concepts (Golley, 2010). This section examines how power shapes behavior and maintains social hierarchies through silence and obedience (Passini & Morselli, 2008). In this context, silence is a powerful form of communication that can reflect and reinforce power imbalances (Leone, 2017). Obedience is a complex negotiation of social expectations and individual agency (StudyCorgi, 2022). Social constructionism and postcolonial feminism can help us understand how these constructs work in the novel and society (Ashcroft et al., 2003).

A. Marriage as a Disciplinary Institution

Dra Peter L. Berger and Hansfried Kellner's social constructionist framework provides a compelling lens through which to interpret the role of marriage in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*. According to Berger and Kellner (1964), marital relationships are not neutral or natural but serve as contexts for the construction of social identity. In this text, the "wife" is not a role assumed through mutual engagement but a disciplinary construct imposed through coercion, surveillance, and cultural scripting. The protagonist's identity is not self-determined but fabricated within a structure designed to erase individuality and enforce patriarchal order (Brun, 2022).

The narrator likens her marriage to a "film set" (Kandasamy, 2020, p. 21), where she "became an actress" (p. 21). Domestic order "every object must be put back precisely where it belonged" (p. 22), is not her preference but her husband's demand for docility. Her body, stripped of aesthetic markers, is rendered a "blank" (p. 23), symbolizing ideological plainness. She must flatter him, suppress emotion, and "play the role of an actress playing out the role of a dutiful wife" (p. 26). The admission, "My life depends upon it" (p. 26), underscores the existential necessity of compliance. Marriage thereby enforces a rigid "division of labor" (p. 73), confining women to kitchen and bedroom roles that annul agency (Gowda & Rao, 2018).

Obedience is socially produced rather than intrinsic. Her mother teaches that "stating the obvious is a sure sign of stupidity" (p. 13), discouraging critical voice. Her father instructs, "Speak quietly. Don't speak back... Silence is a shield and a weapon" (p. 135), naturalizing submission. The husband extends this regulation: he blocks internet access "for her own good" (p. 55), co-signs emails, and restricts her contacts. As Berger and Kellner (1964) argue, marital reality is co-constructed, though here it is unilaterally dictated by the husband's manipulation and surveillance.

Purity becomes another disciplinary tool. The husband erases her digital past, demands sexual exclusivity, and condemns lipstick and writing as "impurity." She is branded a "prostitute" (p. 66) and raped as punishment for prior relationships. Her reflection, "I am a whore, so I can be raped; I let myself be raped, so I am a whore" (p. 151), reveals patriarchal logic that disciplines through dehumanization, exemplifying Bedford-Strohm's (2002) account of purity/impurity as mechanisms of cultural control.

Sacrifice is similarly imposed. Her parents insist she remain to protect their reputation: "If you divorce, the town will mock me... Think about us once" (p. 137). Her mother suggests a child to reform her abuser, relocating responsibility onto her body. Female suffering is valorized as familial loyalty, though the narrator subverts this by sabotaging "Project Baby" (p. 172). Social violence reinforces obedience: "a bride is burnt every ninety minutes" (p. 161). Her statement, "to be radical means having to cut myself off at the root" (p. 202), articulates the profound rupture required for escape. Collective memory, as Halbwachs (1992) observes, reinforces such roles, rendering resistance both political and existential.

Thus, marriage functions not as a domestic partnership but as a disciplinary regime. It produces the "obedient" (p. 25) and "sacrificial" (p. 174) wife through coercion, shame, and violence. The narrator's resistance to refusing silence, erasure, and sacrifice exposes marriage as a locus of epistemic violence, demanding selfhood through rupture rather than accommodation.

B. The Husband as Enforcer of Patriarchal Discourse

Kandasamy portrays the husband not merely as an individual perpetrator of violence but as a symbolic enforcer of the ideological machinery of patriarchy, caste, and nationalism. His control extends beyond physical abuse to psychological, symbolic, and discursive domination, regulating the narrator's time, body, language, and consciousness. His violence encompasses psychological, discursive, and epistemic dimensions. As Kandasamy notes, the harm inflicted is not only physical but also ideological, embedded in both marriage and nationhood (p. 107).

Confined within "three rooms and a veranda" (p. 21), the narrator performs labor, "clean floors. Fold clothes… make coffee" (p. 68) as proof of submission. Berger and Luckmann's theory of social reality, alongside Butler's performativity, illustrates how these rituals script her identity: she must "lie about having a happy marriage because her life depends on it" (p. 86). Her body is policed into invisibility, hair oiled, no kohl, plain clothes, becoming "blank" (p. 156), a "nobody" (p. 157). Even lipstick is condemned: "The lipstick will not survive the New Democratic Revolution" (p. 114).

Patriarchal and casteist domination is clearest in sexual regulation. Marital rape becomes "punishment" (p. 147) or "a long-ago love story" (p. 148). Her contraception is framed as "genocide" (p. 173), revealing caste anxieties over lineage.

Autonomy is further curtailed: her internet access is rationed to "three hours a week" (p. 55), emails monitored, and identity policed. Familial maxims like "Silence is golden" (p. 138) are institutionalized into forced muteness: "It was your tongue in your mouth that forced me into silence" (p. 150).

The husband's epistemic violence delegitimizes her intellectual labor. Feminism is condemned as "structural violence" (p. 130); her writing is dismissed as "elite prostitution" (p. 67). Manuscripts are deleted, and her laptop is seized. Yet her persistence typing on a "clunky Nokia E63" (p. 67) renders writing a survival strategy. The house becomes a "re-education camp" (p. 35), where revolutionary rhetoric is twisted to legitimize patriarchal control.

Thus, the husband embodies institutional patriarchy, enforcing control through coercion, caste ideology, sexual ownership, and epistemic suppression. Yet the narrator's linguistic resistance and metanarrative interventions expose marriage as a contested site, one of repression but also of subversive possibility.

C. Performing Silence

Butler's (2015) theory of performativity finds chilling resonance in the lived experience of the protagonist in *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. Butler argues that identity is constituted through the repetition of socially sanctioned norms. In Kandasamy's narrative, the protagonist's identity as "wife" is not assumed voluntarily but violently imposed through coercion and patriarchal surveillance. Silence becomes her most pervasive performance, a survival strategy within a domestic regime that demands submission, invisibility, and compliance.

The narrator's body is disciplined into erasure: oiled hair, plain clothes, no kohl. She becomes "a blank... no one even sees" (p. 23). Domesticity is ritualised: she inhabits "a perfect film set" (p. 21), "an actress" (p. 21) staging proof of diligence. As she observes, "I am the wife playing the role of an actress... I play the role with flair" (p. 25). Language too is regulated: she must consult to "make him feel like a king" (p. 25). Exiting Facebook, her "lifeline to the world outside" (p. 49), signals professional and symbolic silencing. Her confession, "In this language, I am nothing except a housewife" (p. 81), reveals the link between linguistic and existential erasure.

Silence intensifies through sexual coercion. Rape is reframed as discipline: "penetration is punishment" (p. 148). She learns to "be still and silent. Calm even" (p. 83). Reproductive coercion extends this control, with contraception condemned as "genocide" (p. 173). Her covert resistance sabotaging fertility rituals enacts agency through subtle defiance.

Marriage is thus a "re-education camp" (p. 35), where feminism is vilified as "making you an individual" (p. 104). Her manuscripts are deleted, and her writing censored. The asymmetry is stark: "I cry, he chronicles" (p. 73). Yet her secret drafts, written on a "clunky Nokia E63" (p. 67), become acts of survival.

Butler (2015) reminds us that identity emerges through enforced repetition. In Kandasamy's novel, silence, submission, and erasure are imposed performances. Yet within these regimes, the narrator's quiet refusals, her sabotage, her writing, and her meta-narrative critique constitute subversive counter-performances. The novel thus exposes how marriage enforces obedience through coercive performativity, while simultaneously revealing the fissures where resistance and selfhood can persist.

IV. The Female Body as a Constructed and Contested Site

In *When I Hit You*, the female body emerges not as a natural entity but as a contested site where power, ideology, and resistance intersect. Subject to the disciplinary gaze and violent acts, the protagonist's body becomes a canvas upon which societal expectations and patriarchal norms are inscribed (Nayar, 2010). The body is not merely a physical form but a construct shaped by social scripts of shame and honor, constantly controlled and surveilled within the confines of her marriage. This control extends to her intellectual and creative expression, with her writing suppressed and her thoughts policed, reflecting a broader effort to enforce submissiveness (Allegranti, 2013). This section will examine how her body is controlled and surveilled, reflecting social scripts of shame and honor while also exploring moments of resistance where she reclaims autonomy (Allegranti, 2013). Drawing on postcolonial feminist perspectives, this examination will explore how the woman's body is entwined with the honor of family and nation and how she navigates these complex dynamics through acts of refusal, survival, and imaginative liberation (Rizzo & Gerontakis, 2017).

A. Bodily Control and Surveillance

Patriarchal dominance, legitimized by pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric, is inscribed on the protagonist's body through both physical violence and ideological coercion. For post-colonial feminists, such practices exemplify how authoritarian discourses dehumanize the female body.

The most immediate form of control is physical abuse. Her feet and hair, symbols of dignity and femininity, become marks of subjugation. Her mother's remark that her heels were "cracked and her soles were twenty-five shades darker than the rest of her" (p. 14), "the feet of a slave" (p. 14), reveals how relentless domestic labor erases humanity. Her father washing her "blackened and cracked and scarred" (p. 14) feet symbolizes wounds that are both bodily and symbolic. Damaged hair, infested with lice, intensifies her fear of dehumanization: "Head Louse, Ectoparasite, Pediculus humanus capitis" (p. 18).

Everyday objects - MacBook cord, broomstick, belt, ceramic plates-become instruments of violence, rendering the home a site of constant danger. The escalation is foretold: "Today it is my arms, tomorrow my hair, the next day my backbone, the day after that my head" (p. 134). Physical abuse enforces sexual ownership, as in his demand: "Prove it to

me that you are my wife. Show me you are not thinking of another man" (p. 140). Sexual violence is thus framed as discipline, her screams silenced by "whore" (p. 140) and his claim that rape is "the miracle cure to your silence" (p. 140).

Her appearance is similarly regulated. Hair must be "gathered and tamed into a ponytail, oiled, sleek" (p. 23), with no adornments. He asserts, "The responsibility of the female body belongs to me" (p. 36). Lipstick, dismissed as "petit-bourgeois privileges" (p. 114) and "vulgar imperialist culture" (p. 67), is equated with "prostitution" (p. 114). Her sexuality is politicized: "Ordering chow mein is the closest your cunt has got to Maoism" (p. 167). Rape is deployed as punishment to render her "ruined" (p. 146) and "undesirable" (p. 146), her body reduced to a "spittoon for his insults" (p. 148).

Ideological degradation intensifies when he claims she is "not fit for me to call you a comrade" (p. 121). Internalizing his rhetoric, she critiques her feminism as a "middle-class project" (p. 122) and views Communism as a failed faith. His obsession with reproduction further reveals how her body becomes a vessel of lineage. Resistance to pregnancy is recast as "a systematic conspiracy" (p. 173) or "genocide" (p. 173). Her reproductive body is thus conscripted into ideological warfare.

Ultimately, the protagonist's body is reshaped to align with patriarchal and pseudo-revolutionary ideals. Abuse, surveillance, and reproductive coercion operate together to erase agency and enforce submission, exemplifying how post-colonial feminism locates bodily control at the core of patriarchal power.

B. Social Scripts of Shame and Honor

Kandasamy illustrates how the female body becomes both a target of violence and a symbolic site upon which patriarchal ideologies of shame and honor are inscribed. Through a postcolonial feminist lens, the protagonist's body is not merely controlled but constructed as an ideological canvas for familial, societal, and national anxieties. Her experience exposes the disciplining force of discourses surrounding purity, endurance, and respectability, which work to silence women and bind them to performative roles of submission.

From the outset, the protagonist is compelled to endure abuse in marriage as a culturally sanctioned rite of passage. Her mother normalizes violence: "The first year is the worst" (p. 136), while her father's concerns are rooted in reputation, not well-being: "If you divorce, town will mock me… Your upbringing will show" (p. 137). Her decision to leave stems less from self-preservation and more from a fear of dishonoring her family. Silence is prescribed as a virtue: "Speak quietly. Do not respond" (p. 138), This moral economy of shame enshrines female endurance as honourable, ensuring the reproduction of patriarchal values under the guise of filial duty.

Outside the domestic sphere, the protagonist continues to face societal scrutiny and victim-blaming. Her delay in leaving is weaponized against her: "Why did she not leave sooner?" (p. 186) exemplifying how public discourse demands that survivors justify their trauma. Her statement, "The shaming is in being asked to stand to judgment" (p. 187), captures the violence embedded in such expectations. The legal system mirrors this ethos: a police inspector makes a crude joke about her husband and attributes the abuse to dowry inadequacies, implying that violence is an anticipated, if not deserved, outcome of marriage.

To leave with "dignity" (p. 64), the protagonist realizes she must present herself as escaping death rather than her husband. "A woman who runs away from death is more dignified than a woman who runs away from her man" (p. 178), she reflects. This observation underscores how the intertwined scripts of honor and shame compel women to moralize their survival, denying them the right to autonomy without justification.

Postcolonial feminist critique reveals how her body becomes a site of ideological regulation. Her husband imposes aesthetic restrictions: hair "gathered and tamed" (p. 23), face unadorned, and clothes deliberately drab, transforming her into a blank subject, an idealized "Communist woman" (p. 36), and a "good housewife" (p. 23). His declaration that "the responsibility of the female body belongs to me" (p. 36) epitomizes the patriarchal belief in bodily ownership, aligning personal control with nationalist conceptions of purity and honor.

This policing of her appearance extends to language and public interaction. A student equates her loose hair with shamelessness, invoking colonial tropes wherein unbound hair symbolized Western decadence. Her husband similarly castigates her for using English, "the language of the colonizer" (p. 66), linking linguistic agency to sexual promiscuity. Her intellect, speech, and appearance are thus coded as transgressions against postcolonial ideals of femininity and cultural integrity.

Even seemingly trivial items, like lipstick, become sites of ideological contestation. Forced to remove it after being labelled a "prostitute" (p. 114), she is made to conform to an anti-capitalist, puritanical aesthetic. Her husband equates sexuality with political betrayal: "Ordering chow mein is the closest your cunt has got to Maoism" (p. 116), mocking her intellect and autonomy. In his "orientation course" (p. 116), her body is monitored, humiliated, and subjected to ideological correction.

Sexual violence is the most visceral form of this discipline. Marital rape is framed as retribution. "Your cunt will be ruined… as wide as a begging bowl" (p. 146), was meant to punish, not to violate, and thus "correct" her disobedience. Her body becomes, in her words, a "spittoon for his insults" (p. 148), where caste, gender, and nationalist fantasies of pollution and purity violently converge.

Her reproductive capacity is similarly conscripted into ideological service. Her husband's obsession with impregnating her is framed as a political and communal imperative; failure to conceive is labelled "genocide" (p. 173). When she resists, he publicly assaults her, asserting control over her womb as a vessel of lineage and legacy. Her quiet defiance of adding

"white sesame seeds" and "raw, green mangoes" (p. 172) to meals becomes a subversive act of reclaiming bodily autonomy against biological colonization.

Language, too, is a tool of subjugation. Her knowledge of Kannada is restricted to the domestic term "hendathi": (wife) (p. 81), emphasizing her confinement to a singular, reductive identity within marriage. This linguistic alienation reflects a broader symbolic reduction: from individual to wife, from subject to bearer of honor.

Ultimately, *When I Hit You* exposes how patriarchal and nationalist ideologies intersect to discipline and erase female subjectivity. Through familial obligation, bodily control, and ideological indoctrination, women are scripted into roles that uphold collective honor at the expense of personal agency. Kandasamy's narrative, read through postcolonial feminism, unveils how shame and honor become tools of regulation, transforming marriage into a political institution that polices women's bodies, voices, and futures.

C. Resistance Through Embodiment

In *When I Hit You*, the protagonist resists patriarchal domination through an embodied defiance that operates both within and against the structures of surveillance, coercion, and control. Read through a postcolonial feminist lens, her resistance emerges not merely in moments of overt rebellion but in subtle, strategic engagements with the gendered and nationalistic discourses inscribed upon her body. The female body, often rendered a site of shame, purity, and honor is reclaimed here as a terrain of agency and insurgency.

Yet, the protagonist resists through subtle and overt acts that reclaim her body as a site of agency. Silence becomes strategic: her father's dictum, "Silence is a shield and also a weapon" (p. 135), is reconfigured as refusal, unsettling her husband's authority. Bodily compliance turns subversive: the "mask of plainness" (p. 24), serves as camouflage, while discarding lipstick becomes an act of redefinition. Her most radical defiance lies in rejecting reproduction, thwarting "Project Baby" (p. 172), by using contraceptive ingredients.

Resistance grows explicit in her verbal challenge: "A brave man doesn't rape and hit his wife. My husband, you're not brave" (p. 180). Domestic spaces, traditionally oppressive, become tactical ground: "the only component of our marriage where I have the upper hand" (p. 86). Mobility, too, marks liberation: "An auto-rickshaw speeds into the night. Shed this miserable city like a second skin" (p. 181). Even her decision to frame departure as escape from death rather than marriage (p. 178) reflects strategic negotiation of patriarchal optics.

Writing becomes her ultimate act of resistance. Despite surveillance, she continues: "I'm the happiest woman I've ever known. When I leave, I shine" (p. 69). She instructs, "Don't let people take your story away. Be ruthless even to your mother" (p. 18). Through writing, she constructs a "written body" (p. 201) that is "rape resistant" (p. 203), reclaiming authorship over selfhood.

Thus, the body once inscribed by domination becomes a terrain of insurgency. Through silence, refusal, and creativity, the protagonist transforms her embodied experience into a site of defiance, affirming that resistance persists even within structures designed to erase her.

V. Writing as a Strategy of Reclamation

In *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, the female body does not function as a passive biological entity but as a contested site where patriarchal, cultural, and ideological power converge. As Rizzo (2017) suggests, the body becomes a terrain of inscription, discipline, and symbolic violence, a notion further reinforced by Nayar (2010), who reads the protagonist's body as a canvas upon which the forces of familial honor, national purity, and gendered expectation are imposed. Nevertheless, in this coercively inscribed space, the protagonist discovers agency through language, narrative, and authorship. This section analyzes how writing emerges as a postcolonial feminist act of resistance, where the protagonist reclaims not only her body but also her subjectivity.

Through the insights of postcolonial feminist theorists such as Mohanty (1991) and Spivak (1999), it becomes evident that the act of writing is central to disrupting hegemonic discourses. While Mohanty (1991) critiques the epistemic silencing of Third World women, Spivak (1999) calls for "strategic essentialism," allowing the subaltern to speak within and against dominant paradigms. In this context, the protagonist's insistence on authoring her story rather than allowing it to be narrated by her mother, her husband, or society marks a radical intervention. Her rejection of her mother's trivializing narrative ("head lice and feet") as "plain plagiarism" (p. 18) is significant: "Don't let people remove you from your story. Be ruthless, even if it is your own mother" (p. 18). Writing thus becomes both an act of deconstruction and reconstitution, dismantling received scripts and rewriting the self with conscious authorship.

Composing under the threat of surveillance, the protagonist reclaims space and agency through clandestine acts of writing. When her laptop is confiscated, she mentally drafts prose while performing domestic labor and later uploads an article using her husband's SIM card. The moment of publication brings a visceral sense of liberation: "I'm the happiest woman I've ever known. I'm radiant when I step out" (p. 69). In these moments, the subversive act of writing becomes a praxis of resistance, a private rebellion with public reverberations.

Her conceptualization of the "written body" (p. 201) powerfully illustrates this reclaiming: "My written body opens up only to the extent I decide to demarcate... My woman's body, when it is written down, is rape resistant" (p. 201). By textualizing her corporeality, the protagonist wrests control over the representation of her body, transforming it from a

site of violence to one of narrative sovereignty. Language thus becomes a boundary-setting device that protects and redefines her embodiment.

Mohanty and Spivak are embodied in the protagonist's critical arguments. Her article's reception, eliciting responses from "hundreds of women" who identify with her narrative, signals a moment of collective visibility as writing shifts from individual catharsis to feminist testimony, from private survival to communal voice.

This metafictional awareness is embedded in the novel's narrative structure. The protagonist casts herself as "the actress, the self-anointed director, the cinematographer, and the screenplay writer" (p. 21) of her life, demonstrating a conscious manipulation of narrative framing. Through this self-reflexivity, she distances herself from pain, saying, "Everything around me appears[s] less frightening; my experiences are at a remove" (p. 21). Her escape too is planned narratively: "I will give all of you an ending to this story to which you cannot object... a return to my parental home, to that state of innocence" (p. 177).

Refusing to name the abusive husband reinforces her narrative control. He is anonymized through labels like "my husband" (p. 13), "the politician" (p. 44), and "the lecturer" (p. 171), stripped of individuality and transformed into a symbol of systemic masculinity. This deliberate narrative strategy reverses the power dynamics: the abuser is silenced, de-individualized, and objectified.

The novel's fragmented structure mirrors the protagonist's reconstruction of self. The shifts between temporality, imagined letters, and philosophical meditations represent her attempt to gather "fragments of individuality, and scattered across the scenery of our love" (p. 44). These literary shards are pieced together to form a reconstituted self. The red dot motif, initially a symbol of sexualized ideology, evolves throughout the narrative, reflecting her psychological disorientation and gradual reclamation.

This fragmented narrative enables the emergence of a constructed but autonomous subjectivity. In the closing affirmations "I am the woman…" (p. 208), the protagonist disavows externally imposed categories: "I am not any of the categories I thought I was; I am not any of the categories I was molded into being" (p. 208). Writing becomes not merely representational but ontological—it is the very process of becoming. Her self-assigned title "writer" (p. 208) is a declaration of self-recognition, self-creation, and self-respect.

The literary body she constructs-"the only body I feel empowered to share is the body I fashion out of my own words" (p. 208)-is protected, narrated, and owned. Through writing, she transforms her suffering into a source of creative power: "I am the woman with wings, the woman who can fly and fuck at will" (p. 209). Her past, though traumatic, is not erased but "put up in exhibition frames" (p. 209), no longer hidden, no longer shameful.

In *When I Hit You*, writing functions as an emancipatory force. The protagonist reclaims the authorship of her body, her voice, and her story. Through narrative resistance, she subverts patriarchal domination, asserting not only survival but sovereignty. Writing here is not an aftermath of trauma—it is its counter-narrative, a revolutionary act of reclamation.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, *When I Hit You* powerfully illustrates that gendered subjectivity is not an inherent attribute but a social construct shaped by the forces of patriarchy, nationalism, and linguistic control, revealing how societal norms dictate and confine female identity (D'antonio, 2022). The novel demonstrates how identity is not simply suppressed by these forces but actively produced through discourse (Nayar, 2010), showing how language and communication shape our understanding of ourselves and others. The protagonist's experiences reveal how societal expectations, familial pressures, and even physical violence work to inscribe a specific, sacrificial role onto the female body, limiting autonomy and reinforcing patriarchal structures (Rizzo & Gerontakis, 2017), illustrating the tangible consequences of these constructed roles on a woman's freedom and well-being. However, the novel also offers a compelling counter-narrative: a testament to the power of writing as a strategy of reclamation (Zuss, 1995), highlighting the potential for self-expression to challenge and overcome these constraints. Through her acts of deconstruction, her metafictional awareness, and her fragmented storytelling, the protagonist reclaims agency and reassembles a self shattered by abuse, showing how she actively dismantles the imposed identity and rebuilds her own. Her refusal to name her husband, her conceptualization of a "written body," and her insistence on writing her own story all demonstrate how language can be wielded as a tool of resistance, emphasizing the empowering nature of language and narrative control. Through her writing, she not only reclaims her own identity but also contributes to a collective articulation of women's experiences, offering a powerful example of how marginalized voices can challenge and rewrite the dominant narratives that seek to define them (Mohanty, 1989), thereby highlighting the broader impact of individual stories in challenging systemic oppression.

Looking towards future directions, the novel opens up numerous comparative possibilities within Indian English literature by women. Similar patterns of gendered subjectivity, bodily control, and resistance through narrative can be explored in other texts that grapple with the complexities of being a woman in a postcolonial, patriarchal society. Further research might investigate how these texts collectively contribute to a broader feminist project of dismantling oppressive structures and envisioning alternative futures (Zuss, 1995). By examining the diverse strategies employed by women writers to challenge and subvert dominant narratives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the trans formative potential of literature as a tool for social change.

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T. G. P. Priyadharsini was born in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India, in 1994. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Pavai Arts and Science College for Women, Namakkal, affiliated with Periyar University, in 2015, and her Master of Arts degree in English from Annamalai University, Chidambaram, in 2018. She is presently pursuing her Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature at SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai. Her research interests include Social Criticism and Indian English Literature.

She has professional experience as an Exam Coordinator at the Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology (2014–2017), and as an Accountant at Valliammai Society, Kattankulathur (2018). She has actively participated in national and international seminars, webinars, and faculty development programmes, and has presented papers at several academic conferences. Her recent publications include A Study of Re-Examined Concept of Socio-Economic Realism in Aravind Adiga's Short Stories (Webology, 2021), Social Critique Through Urbanisation and Globalisation in Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss (Dharmadoot, 2024), and Understanding Social Criticism in the Context of Contemporary Indian Literature: A Critical Examination (Journal of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai, 2024).

Ms. Priyadharsini received the Governor's Award in Junior Red Cross for her community engagement. She continues to contribute to English studies through her research, academic writing, and participation in professional forums, with a commitment to fostering critical and socially engaged literary scholarship.

S. Mahadevan was born and brought up in Cuddalore. Presently, he is residing in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Periyar Arts College in Cuddalore in the year 2001. Further, he completed his Master of Arts in English Literature in 2004 from Annamalai University, Chidambaram. Then, he completed his Master of Philosophy from Annamalai University, Chidambaram in 2006. He researched Gandhian Ideology in Chamman Nahal's works. In the year 2015, he received his Doctorate from Bharathiar University in Coimbatore. His area of specialization is English Language Teaching.

He has worked as an Assistant Professor at various engineering colleges in and around Chennai. He has 18 years of experience in teaching students of various levels. His strength is always connecting with the students to actively take part in the classroom activity. In 2015, Panimalar Institute of Technology, Chennai, awarded him the Best Teacher Award for his academic excellence. Presently, he is working as an Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpet. Currently, He is guiding four Ph.D. Scholars. His teaching and research areas of interest is English Language Teaching (ELT), Indian Writing in English, American Literature, Cultural Studies, and Disability Studies. He has published research papers in various journals. Some of the publications are:

[1] Dr. S. Mahadevan, (2024), "Healing the Self: Mental Health and Existential Recovery in the Select Works of Don DeLillo", South Eastern European Journal of Public Health (Volume XXV), pp. 1293-1299.

[2] Dr. S. Mahadevan, (2024), "Psychological Trauma: An Existential Analysis in the Select Works of Don DeLillo", Library Progress International, (Volume 44), No 3, pp. 707-709.

[3] Dr. S. Mahadevan, (2024), "Bad Faith: An Existential Analysis in Don DeLillo's Players", Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, (Volume XXXI), No.2, pp. 86-92.

N. Sheik Hameed is a dedicated and experienced educator with over twelve years of teaching expertise in English. He currently serves as an Assistant Professor of English at B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India. He earned his Ph.D. in English Literature from AnnamalaiUniversity, specializing in British Literature.

His research interests span Literature and Medical Humanities, and he has published several articles and book chapters in Scopus, Springer, and Nature Group journals. Certified with a 150-hour TESOL/TEFL qualification, he has taught a wide range of courses, including Communication Skills, Soft Skills, and Workplace English, for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

In addition to teaching, he serves as a Language Editor in the Office of the Dean of Research and actively contributes to academic committees and mentoring. His work reflects a passion for innovative pedagogy and interdisciplinary scholarship.

V. Uma Maheswari was born in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India, in 1967. She received the B.Sc. degree in Chemistry from Kunthavai Nachiyar Government Arts College for Women, Thanjavur. Tamil Nadu, India, in 1988. M.A. degree in English Literature from Kunthavai Nachiyar Government Arts College for Women, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India, in 1991. B.Ed. degree in English from University of Madras, Chennai, India.1993. The M.Phil. degree in English literature from Government Arts College for Men, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, in 1999. Ph.D. in English Literature from the Research Department of English, A.V.V.M. Sri Pushpam College, Poondi, Thanjavur, Tamilnadu India in 2014.

She has been involved in teaching, research and academic publications. She has published articles in National, International Seminars, Peer reviewed journal and contributed chapter to edited Books.

She has received 6 awards:

1. Tamil Sudar Award – 2009
2. Elakkiya Scholar Award – 2012
3. Senthamizh Ko Award – 2013
4. Bharathi Tamil Semmal Award – 2017
5. Kavi Muhil Award -2018
6. Best Performer Award -2022-23

She has presented 16 papers in International seminars, 20 papers in National seminars. Published 16 research articles in reputed journals.12 articles in books with ISBN number. Her current research interests include Indian Writing in English.

S. Karthik Kumar is a Professor of English at Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, India, and he is, at present, heading the century-old department. He is also serving as the Deputy Director, IQAC of the University. He has put in 25 years of teaching and research experience. His research interests lie in Post-Colonial Literature and Eco Studies in Literature. With his research guidance, 20 Ph.D. scholars and 25 M.Phil. Scholars have successfully earned their degrees. Karthik Kumar has completed 02 Major Research Projects sponsored by UGC and 01 minor project sponsored by RUSA, and presently he is part of an ongoing project sponsored by the Tribal Welfare Development, Govt. of Tamil Nadu.

He has considerable research publication to his credit: more than 120 articles in National/international journals; 30 articles in edited books with ISBN; and 30 papers in conference proceedings. Besides, he has authored two books and edited nearly 20 books.

As Co-ordinator/Organising Secretary, he has been involved in the conduct of more than 20 workshops/Conferences/Seminars. He is a member of Boards of Studies in English of as many as 20 institutions across India. As a resource person, he has delivered invited talks in workshops, seminars and refresher programmes. Karthik Kumar has visited Singapore and Australia for academic purposes.