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**Narrating Survival: Trauma, Resistance, and Feminist Poetics in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You***

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**Article Received:** 25/04/2025**Article Accepted:** 27/05/2025**Published Online:** 29/05/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.19.05.572

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**Abstract:** This paper explores Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* through the lens of trauma, resistance, and feminist poetics. A fictionalized memoir, the novel recounts the protagonist's harrowing experience of domestic violence at the hands of her manipulative husband. Using lyrical yet unflinching language, Kandasamy dismantles romanticized ideals of Indian marriage, giving voice to silences often buried beneath cultural pride. This research analyzes how Kandasamy converts personal trauma into literary resistance—writing as both catharsis and confrontation. The paper situates the novel within Indian feminist literature and global trauma narratives, ultimately showing that the act of storytelling becomes an act of survival.

**Introduction:** Domestic violence is not a foreign issue; it resides close, within homes, marriages, and sometimes—inside those we trust most. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* is a deeply personal yet politically charged portrayal of abuse in an educated, urban Indian marriage. Written with a poet's precision and an activist's fury, the novel refuses to romanticize the suffering of women. Instead, it exposes the many forms violence takes: physical, emotional, intellectual, and linguistic.

This paper studies *When I Hit You* not just as a literary text, but as a testimony—a record of lived experience shaped into art. Through its lyrical yet biting prose, the novel asks: What does survival look like when your voice is constantly silenced? And can writing become more than expression—can it be resistance?

**Literature Review:** The novel aligns with feminist trauma theory, particularly as outlined by Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*, where reclaiming narrative is essential to healing. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony* frames trauma narratives as both personal and political, a crucial lens for understanding how Kandasamy's narrator uses storytelling to bear witness.

In the context of Indian feminist literature, *When I Hit You* continues the tradition of Kamala Das, Ismat Chughtai, and Urvashi Butalia, but with a contemporary boldness.

Nivedita Menon's *Seeing Like a Feminist* offers insights into the systemic nature of gender violence that Kandasamy critiques through fiction. Yet Kandasamy's voice is uniquely unrelenting—combining fire with formality, rebellion with rhetoric. Although her novel received critical praise, it remains under-discussed in academic circles—a gap this paper aims to address.

**The Language of Pain: Poetry in Prose:** Meena Kandasamy is first and foremost a poet. That identity seeps into every line of *When I Hit You*. Even scenes describing her physical abuse are narrated with aching beauty—not to romanticize pain, but to give it shape: something to hold, something to fight with.

The protagonist composes poems in her mind while enduring violence, an act of both escape and endurance. Kandasamy's lyrical narrative isn't aesthetic indulgence—it's an assertion of voice. Her protagonist may not control her surroundings, but she can still control her syntax. She plays with metaphors, alliteration, and repetition, clinging to language as her last unviolated space.

**Marriage as Patriarchal Entrapment:** In Indian society, marriage is often held up as a sacred institution—one that must be protected at all costs. Kandasamy dismantles this sanctity brick by brick. Her protagonist enters marriage with idealism and is quickly trapped in a fortress of isolation, where abuse is camouflaged as ideology.

The husband, a self-proclaimed Marxist intellectual, weaponizes theory to control her. He forbids her from writing, accuses her of bourgeois distractions, and reduces her to a mere 'wife'—stripped of art, ambition, and autonomy. The irony is cruel: a man who preaches equality becomes the tyrant of her life. Kandasamy exposes the hypocrisy not just of the man, but of a society that applauds his activism while ignoring his violence. The novel shows that intellectual spaces are not immune to patriarchy. In fact, they may be even more dangerous when abuse is disguised as intellect.

**Writing as Reclamation:** In the worst of moments, the protagonist keeps writing—in her mind, in her dreams. Writing becomes the only space left untouched by violence. And it is through writing that she begins to reconstruct her selfhood.

The narrative is deeply metafictional. We are reading the very book the protagonist says she will one day write. This act of self-reference is powerful—it tells us that she made it. That despite the silencing, she speaks. Her decision to write her story—without gloss, without guilt—is itself an act of survival. Kandasamy affirms what feminist scholars have long asserted: that the act of narrating trauma is the first step to overcoming it.

**Cultural Complicity in Silence:** One of the novel's most disturbing elements is not the husband's violence, but the surrounding silence. The protagonist's parents urge her to

‘adjust’. A police officer mocks her. An aunt tells her it is her karma. Kandasamy implicates society in the abuse. The silence around her suffering is not passive—it is violent.

This complicity is cultural. Indian society places immense value on women’s endurance, glorifying their silence as strength. Kandasamy shatters that myth. Her protagonist does not stay quiet. She screams, writes, and eventually escapes—not to be praised, but to live.

**Feminism as Fire:** Kandasamy’s feminism is not academic—it is visceral. The novel is threaded with political commentary: from censorship to caste to male-led revolutions that ignore women’s realities. Her feminism is angry, unapologetic, and radical.

This is most evident in the protagonist’s internal rebellion. Even as her husband beats her, she imagines counterarguments, witty retorts, and political essays. Her mind remains untamed. Her rage is not a weakness but a compass. In one passage, she says: “I wanted to bite back with the ferocity of my words.” And that is what she does—turns her bruises into sentences that bite.

**Surviving, Not Romanticizing:** Kandasamy resists the temptation of a triumphant ending. The protagonist escapes, but she is not ‘cured’. She attends therapy. She questions herself. She lives with memory. But she writes. That is her victory—not in being unbroken, but in being alive and vocal.

This honest portrayal of aftermath is crucial. Too often, stories of abuse end at escape, ignoring the long tail of recovery. Kandasamy tells us: survival is not a chapter—it’s a lifelong rewrite.

**Conclusion:** *When I Hit You* is a fearless, lyrical, and necessary novel that speaks into the void left by silence. Meena Kandasamy, through a character both fictional and autobiographical, brings the private into public. She writes with the urgency of a woman who knows what it means to be erased—and who chooses, instead, to be loud.

The novel is not just about a woman who was beaten. It is about a woman who refused to disappear. In giving voice to her pain, Kandasamy gives voice to countless others—offering not a moral lesson, but a mirror. And in doing so, she reclaims literature as a space where women do not just survive—they write.

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