

Scrutinising the Debasement of a Female Body through Marital Violence and Digital Media in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

Inderjot Kaur and Tanu Gupta

Abstract

Marriage establishes a sacred bond between two individuals, encompassing all of their rights and obligations as a social, cultural, and legal institution. But even in this modernised era women are continued to be the most vulnerable and oft-exploited segment of this sacred bond. They are many women who are still the victims of marital, domestic, and gender-based violence and their bodies are treated as a hotbed where men enact violence and is also a site on which people's societal notions of gender difference are engraved. This research analyses the debasement of a female body through marital violence and digital media in Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. It is one of the few significant works on the subject of marital abuse, gender incongruity, and the mistreatment of a female body as a means to assert masculine superiority. In the context of Judith Butler's concept of gender performance and other feminist perspectives, this study unravels how a woman experiences the evil effects of socially-defined gender roles and their construction, as well as how female bodies can be brutalised through marital violence and digital media as a means to portray various forms of male supremacy.

Keywords: Female body, marital violence, gender-bias, digital media, Judith Butler, gender performance.

Introduction

Regardless of age, time, place, or society, women have traditionally been the most impuissant and exploited group in society. They have been grappling with intricate rituals, a male-dominated culture, and indigenous traditions for a long time. For a number of women, marriage, which is a holy tie based on commitment, understanding, and equality has proven to be terribly violent. The dream of finding the perfect life partner through marriage rarely comes

true for woman because she is always the other, the optional, the ancillary, defined in terms of a system that exists solely to reproduce and immortalise the names of men, virtually elevating them to Divine position in life. In many societies even today, i.e., in this contemporary era, a woman does not have the right to declare her own self, and she cannot acquire the status of an autonomous person like a man because of the gender chauvinism injected by the culture and society. A close reading of Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* illustrates how identity is shaped by societal conditions and gender chauvinism rather than being possessed. Without male supervision, women cannot even have control over their own bodies and desires. As a result, men in marital institutions become dictators and manipulators, holding complete and unquestioned power over women's bodies, particularly their sexuality, effectively transforming them into commodities for use. In marital violence, women are abused, tortured, and assaulted on a regular basis. Men utilise their bodies as a platform to justify violence. As guided by the patriarchal conviction structure, men utilise brutality towards women to control and administer them so that they can use and abuse their bodies to satisfy their tantalising delight. The wife's psychological suppression and control of desire in this novel echo the description of the docile body as mentioned by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, where he elaborates about the body that is both an object and a target of power; it is managed, sculpted, and trained, and it obeys and responds.¹

This article analyses various forms of gendered viciousness in the novel along with the treatment of the female body as a site of oppression and violence through marital violence and digital media. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to scrutinize the reasons behind the debasement of the female body in Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* in the light of Judith Butler's theory which opines that masculinity and femininity are not inherent but are socially constructed (i.e., we are doing gender) along with employing her thought about "Gender Performativity." In the nutshell, this article attempts to perceive how women

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¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books Random House, 1995), p. 136.

experience the evil impacts of gender-based viciousness in a male-controlled society as well as with the purpose of piercing the veil on the silence that surrounds aggressive behavior at home and marital assault in the contemporary era.

Literature Review

This research work focuses on Meena Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017). Meena Kandasamy is a poet, writer, and activist from Chennai born in 1984. After the end of the marriage that propelled *When I Hit You*, she met her recent life partner in 2013 and came to the United Kingdom in 2016, where she now lives. In this novel, Kandasamy composes a hard-hitting record of a writer's marriage, with the goal of lifting the shroud on the quiet that encompasses aggressive behavior at home and conjugal assault in present-day India.

The female body (woman) trapped in the transition of custom and regulations burdened with the gender role, patriarchal surveillance, control, and above all to push off her yearnings comprises the essence of goals of woman's liberation in literature. Her mind is visited by substitute temperaments of expectation and hopelessness, of sparkle and agony in her odyssey for personality and opportunity. Kandasamy's novel epitomises the misery of a woman (female body) rising up out of the condition of oppression and servitude, and looking to build up her character and self. Human beings are not living freely.² They are doing their gender. A number of research works related to this novel highlight the issues prompting ceaseless mistreatment of women; violence in love marriages,³ rigid societal norms,⁴

² Amandeep Singh Marwaha, 'Understanding Violence and Assertion in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*', *Literary Endeavour*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2019), pp. 192-197. See also A. Banupriya, 'Reduction, Deduction and Seduction in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*', *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2018), pp. 86-88.

³ Niranjan Majhi, 'Portrayal of Domestic Violence in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*', *IJRAR- International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2018), pp. 8-11.

⁴ Partha Bhattacharjee and Priyanka Tripathi, 'When a Violated Body Strikes/Writes Back: Unveiling the Violence in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*', *The Atlantic Literary Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2019), pp. 47-63.

marital rape, and the quest for identity,⁵ yet the concept of gender performativity prompting gender inequality that began with Judith Butler has not been applied so far. No study has been published using Butler's approach to this novel. No cognizant effort has been made to examine and comprehend the reasons for the endless plight of the female body as a site of enslavement and brutality in the novel taken for study due to gender performativity.

Methodology and Discussion

In order to include critical scholarship from relevant areas of study in the research work, the study includes a close reading of the author's primary work and a reference to secondary sources. In the twenty-first century much emphasis is laid upon women's empowerment which clearly signifies that women are not powerful enough; they need to be empowered. This entails that still there is no end to the sufferings of women despite the fact that the world has not only become modernised but also digitalised and capitalised from various perspectives; just the means and modes of torment and domination have changed over the years. The identity of a woman is by and large defined by her role within the family. Even in this modernised era women cannot have independent connections, friends, and relatives outside their family. A woman has to bow down to her husband's desires even if she is unwilling to do so. At any point of time a woman has expressed her identity as a person, she has been put through a lot of hardship and deprivation.

When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife is a novel about the physical and psychological entrapment of spousal violence, set in a small town on the coast of India, or more accurately in the three rooms of the house where the narrator rarely departs. Following her marriage, the narrator engages in a marital chess game in which she plays the role of a king who is constantly threatened by her spouse, who plays the role of a drama queen. She creates herself as a character in a film in which she plays an actress in order to demonstrate her role as a good Indian wife, which her husband wishes to direct in the same way that a film director wishes to direct his heroine. She must follow her husband's instructions regarding what to

⁵ Shefali Yateen Jain and Vijaya Babu Yeddu, 'An Exploration of Sexual Violence and Marital Rapes in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You Or, The Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)*', *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2020), pp.1722-1728. See also Tanu Kashyap, 'Feminist Study in Meena Kandasamy's Novels *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* and *The Gypsy Goddess*', *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2018), pp. 66-77.

wear, what should be her hairstyle, how to speak, and how to walk, among other things. During this process, she loses her self-identity “like a home after a heist” and transforms into “Other”. The narrator’s horribly true history of marital abuse, as well as the way infiltration is used as a weapon against women, desensitises the reader:

I begin by wearing my hair the way he wants it: gathered and tamed into a pony tail, oiled, sleek, with no sign of disobedience. I skip the kohl around my eyes because he believes that it is worn only by screen-sirens and seductresses. I wear a dull T-shirt and pajama-bottoms because he approves of dowdiness. Or, I wrap myself in an old cotton sari to remind me of my mother. Some days, when I am especially eager to impress and to escape punishment, I slip into the shapeless monstrosity that is: the nightie. The effect of adhering to my husband’s wishes gives me the appearance of a woman who has given up.⁶

From this statement it can be observed that biased and societal gender construction is to be blamed for this form of dominance and aggression towards women. Butler broadens the feminist sex/gender dichotomy in *Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire*. She claims that scientific discourse shapes sex and that gender is a binary social construct in which “gender mirrors sex”. For her, sex and gender are equally gendered ideas, with gender forming discursive praxis on a “natural sex”. She states that gender roles are constructed by society. According to her, gender is a set of expectations that is defined by society for every individual. Society determines how women and men should act, dress, and walk. Masculinity and femininity do not come naturally to everyone. A newborn girl is expected and compelled to act like her gender from the time it is announced. Gender is a social construct based on biological sex. It is basically the culture that compels one to conduct that gender performance.⁷

The quotation from Simone de Beauvoir, “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one,”⁸ in Butler’s *Gender Trouble* rightly refers to gender as the result of training rather than an innate trait stemming from some essence emerging from the body.

⁶ Meena Kandasamy, *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (New Delhi: Juggernaut, 2017), pp. 15-16.

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of the Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 6-16.

⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of the Identity*, p. 1.

In simple terms, gender is a culturally compelled active appropriation (i.e., allotment), rather than biological sex itself. Gender, like the body, is a social construct that exists solely to receive cultural expression. Gender discourse is constrained by language since it incorporates all of the imagined gender domains and thus imposes its own constraints.⁹ Butler expands on this concept by claiming that gender is a performative concept. They define “doing gender” as a series of performative behaviors that people learn and try to imitate in their own actions and presentations: “Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”¹⁰

Gender, Butler believes, is something that is continuously performed, based on, and reinforced by cultural customs, rather than a biologically set attribute or an intrinsic identity. Additionally, this repeated gender performance is performative in the sense that it creates the notion of gender and the appearance of two basic sexes (though it is more realistically a spectrum). Gender categories form as a result of individuals acting as women and men rather than being women or men. Furthermore, if they fail to properly identify their gender, they will suffer obvious negative consequences.¹¹

Butler questions whether some gendered behaviors are natural, along with demonstrating how one's learned gendered behavior (what we generally associate with femininity and masculinity) is a performance imposed on us by conventional heterosexuality.¹² Developing the inquiries Butler started in *Gender Trouble*, they offer a unique reformulation of the materiality of bodies in her work, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, looking at how the power of heterosexuality frames the “matter” of bodies, sex, and gender. Butler contends that power works to compel “sex” from the beginning, delimiting what counts as a valid sex.¹³

Butler, in other words, questions how self-contained an individual can be; they wonder how much our behaviors are defined for us by our position

⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of the Identity*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of the Identity*, p. 33.

¹¹ Thekla Morgenroth and Michelle K. Ryan, ‘Gender Trouble in Social Psychology: How Can Butler’s Work Inform Experimental Social Psychologists Conceptualization of Gender?’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 9 (2018), pp. 1-9.

¹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 136-137.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011).

within language and convention. As a result, Butler sees gender as a performance that we engage in over and over again, creating the illusion of binary sex. However, because this binary gender presentation is so common, its performative nature is hidden. Others' reactions to those who do not conform to gender norms reinforce gender performance's binary nature. Women are repressed, and people who defy the gender binary are stigmatised and marginalised, either for disrupting the supposed link between sex and gender or sex and sexuality or for questioning the binary system itself. As a result, Butler believes that gender is not necessary or biologically defined, but rather is formed by one's own performance; hence it is performative.¹⁴

Women in the majority of societies, even in modern times, do not have the right to declare their own identity nor do they have the ability to attain the autonomy like men because of this kind of gender chauvinistic cultural and social attitudes and patriarchal high-handedness which is ingrained in the system. Both men and women have pre-defined roles in our gender-biased society. Society does not accept a person who does not play his or her role as a male or female. The oppression of women is unending as a result of this mindset, and it is one of the reasons for taboos that exist in diverse societies. The ideology of the male dominating society needs to be changed in order to ensure equal rights among men and women.

In *Understanding Patriarchy*, bell hooks states that patriarchy is a perilous social infection. Man-controlled society is a political-social framework that demands that males are innately ruling, better than everything blessed with the option to rule and dominate by means of mental and physical violence. Man-centric society elevates viciousness to maintain male strength; the authority figure is to administer, and the frail is to submit.¹⁵ This societal injected thought that males are physically stronger than females, and are born to govern them, also needs to be changed. They should not have the advantage of reigning over women on the basis of such an ideology. But the fact is that even if the males wanted to get rid of such a ruling behavior against women they are unable to do so because male dominance is institutionalised in them through various social and cultural practices considering females to be physically weak which is one of the key reasons for suppressing and assaulting women.

¹⁴ Morgenroth and Ryan, 'Gender Trouble in Social Psychology', pp. 1-9.

¹⁵ bell hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy* (Louisville: Louisville Anarchist Federation, 2010).

In Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, a similar position is expressed, that females are considered weak because of their reproductive organs. De Beauvoir points out that biological essentialist and determinist models that characterise women as evidenced by her conceptive physiology strengthen women's relationship with their bodies and nature. In this perspective, she is weak and detached, a receptacle for the male's longings and a hatchery for his offspring; a creature driven by sensation and impulse; a prisoner of her regenerative reproductive organs/hormones. A woman is entirely rooted in her body - an object consumed by its own immanence:

Woman's relationship with body/nature is reinforced by biological essentialist and determinist ideal models which characterize woman as indicated by her conceptive physiology. She is in this way weak and detached, in a real sense a receptacle for the longings of the male and hatchery for his posterity; a creature driven by feeling and impulse; a captive to her regenerative reproductive organs/hormones. Man may be able to transcend his biological materiality, but woman is entrenched in her physicality - a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence.¹⁶

By taking into consideration Butler, hooks, de Beauvoir and other feminists, a close reading of Meena Kandasamy's novel reveals that the narrator becomes the victim of gender-obsessed ideology and patriarchal dominance through marital violence and digital media. The narrator is completely controlled by her husband because of the gender roles that are constructed by society demanding males to be innately ruling. The narrative details the physical abuse that progresses with time, from hypothetical threats of guerrilla warfare type violence to gruesome rape, done by a revolutionary against his new wife, whom he met on a Facebook protest event page.

Their friendship blooms in debates on Marxist, Maoist, and Leninist philosophy, which stems from a shared interest in radical politics. When this interest enters the domestic realm, it quickly becomes hierarchical. It is used against the young woman who complains that her husband sleeps with twelve enraged men starting with Hegel and progressing to Guevara, the violent effect of which can be felt by her on her body each night. Even when she pleads with him on a factual level using her grasp of language theory, he dismisses her nonsensical screams and is unable to fathom why she makes a sound. Thus, the narrator's husband uses her feminine body for marital rape in order to assert his male dominance:

¹⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988), p. 189.

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He unwittingly believes that sex involves more than body fluids, and convinced that he is injecting ideology into his crazy wife, he brings eleven angry men to bed each night, inadvertently jeopardizing his own position as the object of her desire.¹⁷

In addition to being a victim of marital rape, the narrator is continually subjugated by her husband, who takes away her personal space and rights. In today's world, it is a fundamental right for a person to utilise social media to promote his or her work and creativity, to obtain news in order to keep informed or to actively become a netizen. He, on the other hand, seeks to cut off her communication with the outside world as well as her freelance writing contacts. With the reasoning that ranges from the politically problematic to the puritanical, he claims that her time online is an obsession that reduces her existence to a series of flaws that he must eliminate. The tools that allow her to contact the outside world are used against her, perhaps actually: her laptop charger causes red welts, her email server is erased, her Facebook account is deactivated, and her phone calls are logged. Her husband reads, reacts, and stamps off her communications under their names. It is an emotional and psychological *Gleichschaltung* that grips and dehumanises the victim. He mandates that she should turn off her Facebook account. He demands her email password and then "liberates" her by deleting her emails:

There is no purpose behind why you ought to be on Facebook. It's narcissism. It's exhibitionism. It's an exercise in futility. I've said this to you many times. It's merely you intentionally feeding information straight to the CIA, to the RAW, to the IB, to everyone who is nagging my life. Every fucking thing is being monitored. Your life might be a peep show, but I'm a revolutionary. I cannot let you to imperil me. We've had this argument so often that I've lost tally. I'm not going to restate everything I've said.¹⁸

Though digital media provides the freedom to disseminate information and stimulate action for fantastic purposes, it can also be used to disseminate odious content and conscious openness, as well as a technique for harassment in a relationship by a patriarchal society.¹⁹ The relationship that began

¹⁷ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 22.

¹⁸ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 50.

¹⁹ Inderjot Kaur and Tanu Gupta, 'Digital Media and Man Woman Relationship: A Study of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*', *Literary Voice*, vol. 15 (2021), pp. 196-201. See also Inderjot Kaur and Tanu Gupta, 'Child Development, Gender Incongruity and Significance of Religious Philosophy for Sustainability: A Comparative Study', *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2022), pp. 3250-3257.

through digital media gradually deteriorated into barbarism, according to the novel. The same digital medium is used to oppress a woman, and her aspirations, and to rob her of her identity and freedom. The narrator recognised that her spouse's demand that she should withdraw from Facebook is a display of summoning collapse in this risky situation:

In my temperamental circumstance, when he wishes me to discontinue myself off or cut off from Facebook, I know that it is an act of career suicide. But at this particular moment, contending with him will not get any solution. I simply believe and find myself lucky enough that he asks me only to 'deactivate' and not really delete my Facebook account.²⁰

Around the same time, her husband offers his email password to her:

You can have this. I do not require it. I have faith in you. Okay. Do you trust me? I do. So? Do you believe me enough to share your passwords with me? I have never shared my passwords with someone else. So, you are hiding something? No.²¹

Her husband truly wants to keep her in his panopticon and maintain his dominance over her at all costs. The narrator expresses herself in this way: "I feel nauseous. I feel robbed of my identity. I'm no longer myself if another person can so easily claim to be me, pretend to be me, and assume any life while we live under the same roof."²²

In this novel, Meena Kandasamy exposes the murky side of ideology-obsessed males. Previously veiled as likes/dislikes or ideals that the husband wanted to follow and impose on his wife, Kandasamy's novel makes the ideology transparent, proclaimed openly, and even what brought the relationship together, but its execution has meant violent acts, death threats, domination through digital media and treating the body as a site of violence in the form of marital rape. The novel depicts the physical evidence of a miserable marriage on the bodies of the couple: "tiny red welts"²³ on her arms where her laptop cord stung her; scorched skin above his ankle after he holds a ladle over the stove and then squeezes it to his leg until she agrees to see a gynaecologist, a dull soreness on her back where a broomstick slammed into her. He has a sprinkling of burns on his elbow, like freckles, from holding one bright match after another, snipping himself until she caves in and disables her Facebook account.

²⁰ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 52.

²¹ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 54.

²² Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 55.

²³ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 51.

Both men and women make equal contributions to the growth of civilisation and the development of society. Yet, there remains gender based discrimination. In our culture men are generally viewed as innocent even if they are flawed, whereas women are regarded as guilty. Women are instructed to accept their circumstances and adjust to them according to their husband's desires. Hence, another example from the novel that is particularly pertinent to Butler's concept of performativity is when the narrator contacts her mother to tell her about what has happened to her, her mother tells her:

Just breathe deeply. Do not give him any ground for suspicion. Let us see how far he goes. 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 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 yourself.²⁴

When she tells her father that her husband has forced her to cut herself off from digital media, he tells her that he has done her a favour: "Will you die if you do not have the internet? Your husband is doing this for your own good."²⁵ Later, when she tells her father about the physical and domestic abuse, he just replied that all of these things are normal in a marriage. He requests that she be patient and tolerant. Her parents are afraid that if she divorced her husband, society would mock and criticise them:

They will say his daughter ran away in less than six months. It will reflect on your upbringing. This is not what I intended for my daughter. You have no idea what a father goes through. A father of a daughter-that is a special kind of punishment. We pay the price.²⁶

From the events in the novel, it is observed that society forces one to perform their gender. Due to this, the female and her body become a site for asserting masculine superiority. The female body is also a site for the metaphorical elimination of a whole community or race; it is a site that bears the burden of honour. This honour does not belong solely to women. Her body bears the honour of her family, as well as the honour of the race and culture to which she belongs. As a result, the female body is a vulnerable location; one whose violation might symbolically violate an entire community and one whose protection is required to sustain the group's purity and integrity, even if it costs her life. The narrator's husband denies her all independence, space, and desires; shatters her hopes of becoming a writer;

²⁴ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 56.

²⁵ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, p. 60.

²⁶ Kandasamy, *When I Hit You*, pp. 139-140.

insists her to behave like an Indian traditional perfect wife, and also treats her body as a site of subjugation in the form of marital rape. Her parents believe her husband's actions are in her best interests.

Apart from all this, the novel also exemplifies the narrator's bravery, demonstrating how she has persevered in the face of adversity. The narrator in the novel is defiant. She retains the tenacity that blazes throughout the novel and makes it seem alive as Feminist writing, even when it appears to be strategic conformity. Despite the fact that this work is about domestic abuse and marital violence, it is also about a woman artist who is unstoppable in her desire and who uses her writing as a kind of redemption in a hostile culture. Her defiance manifests in a variety of ways. When she wishes to avoid becoming pregnant, she prepared foods that are harmful to anything growing in the womb. While her husband is away, she composes letters and deletes them before her husband returns home and inspects the laptop with disgust. If in case he finds her writing a play, the object he grips with would be the ideal prop to embody all the essences of masculinity, dominance, and fragility. He looks for ways to curtail her intellectual independence because she can't, she won't, and she is drawn to writing, even if her only option is to compose mentally. Her work, like water, follows its own path, and it acts as a form of resistance to her tenacity.

Kandasamy was interviewed by *Wired India* and asked why she chose marital violence as a topic. She responded:

pursuing an intellectual life, especially writing, is impossible to do when you are stuck in the middle of everyday abuse because you are battling for mere survival; and, secondly, no matter how much you run away from the experience of being female in order to inhabit other experiences, violence of this kind firmly pushes you in that distressing awareness that your life as an artist will continue to be dictated by your womanhood. So, in tracing the artistic journey of a woman writer, I chose to tell this story – of marital violence – that millions of women face and which breaks them down in countless ways.²⁷

Throughout the novel, the narrator keeps the readers immersed in the world of an unforgiving spouse, a humiliated father who fears embarrassment associated with a divorce, and a mother who assures her that everything will settle down later as time passes.

The way cruelty spreads in an ostensibly 'modern', 'love' marriage

²⁷ Omair Ahmad, 'Interview: Meena Kandasamy on Writing About Marital Violence', *The Wire*, 30 May (2017). At: <https://thewire.in/books/meena-kandasamy-marital-violence>. Accessed 04/05/2022.

is one of the key points raised in this novel. The narrator, on the other hand, is able to flee from her abusive marriage, gaining her freedom and demonstrating to the world that this type of woman exists and must exist in order to demonstrate that gender-biased societal rules cannot bind them. To break free from patriarchal dominance and violence, they must determine their gender roles for themselves.

Conclusion

The narrator's condition while she experiences marital rape, domestic violence, oppression, and gender-biased rigid conventions explores how the female and her body are treated as a tool to practise power and control. A detailed study of *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife* shows how identity is moulded by cultural norms and gender chauvinism rather than being possessed. Women cannot even have control over their own bodies and desires without male supervision. Men thus assume absolute control over women's bodies, especially their sexuality, in marriage institutions, acting as tyrants and manipulators who effectively turn women into commodities for use. Women are routinely mistreated, tortured, and assaulted in marital violence. This research work depicts the hypocrisy of marriage and many violent tactics used to debase a woman's body to dominate her, as well as attempts to purposely and ruthlessly destroy a woman's freedoms. The narrator's husband reminds her over and over that her womanhood is the problem and not his harmful behavior. It is a novel about women's sorrow and suffering at the hands of age-old barbarous traditions created by men and followed by women. It emphasizes the female protagonist's tenacious efforts to defeat the difficulties and keep her zest for life in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society, where women are viewed as slaves. The work highlights various forms of gendered violence and the treatment of the female body as a site of mistreatment and as a commodity wherein a woman's desire and emotions have no role to play. It throws a light on the fact that how the body is socialised and how the gender-based societal and family norms are responsible for maltreatment and domination of women and the female body. It moreover shows how the wild conviction system and conduct are maintained, paying no heed to one's sentiments, education, class, and status.

Hence, Butler's views about gender performance are relevant to the novel that showcases that bodies are subjected to systemic regimens, which are a mechanism that ensures that they behave in socially and politically

acceptable ways. Butler's work is a rallying cry to destabilise these frameworks and halt the terrible practices they foster. Butler claims that gender identity is a by-product of recurring gender performance rather than an inner fact, and that gender is not something one is, but rather something one does or performs. They contend that presenting gender identification as an integral part of one's identity, as many feminist writers did at the time (and still do), supports the gender binary, which aids patriarchy and forced heterosexuality. Feminists should instead focus on determining how the category of 'women' is produced and confined by the means employed to effect social change.

Firstly, a deeper awareness of one's inner self, steadfast drive, and defining gender roles according to one's own desire can help women gain empowerment by breaking the silences around the female body. The traditional concept of gender, as Butler points out, is incorrect. In order to promote equal chances for all genders without any gender distinctions, no one should be forced to obey society's gender norms. Secondly, if women wish to be self-sufficient and control their fierceness against themselves, they should promote women's empowerment rather than leaning toward males to obtain the upper hand, so that female bodies do not become the site where men perpetrate violence.