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REDUCTION, DEDUCTION AND SEDUCTION IN MEENA KANDASAMY'S  
"WHEN I HIT YOU"

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ABSTRACT

A powerful analysis of 'modern marriage', through the art of fiction. The nameless narrator talks about her world that revolves around her misogynist husband. We question our patriarchy of traditional marriages "modern marriages are not like that", "love marriages are not like that". Here Kandasamy proves it to be false. She says "love is not blind; it just looks in the wrong places. "When I hit you" is a book on meditation on love, marriage, violence and how a feminist gets trapped in the name of abusive marriage.

PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER AS A YOUNG WIFE

Three four  
sweep the floor  
Three four  
do the chore  
Three four  
come here where

There are no visible marks-no bruises, no blood, no broken bones.

Seduced by politics and an enduring dream of building a better world together, the unnamed narrator falls in love with a university professor. Moving with him to a rain-washed coastal town, she swiftly learns that what for her is a bond of love is for him a contract of ownership. As he sets about reducing her to his idealized version of an obedient wife bullying her and devouring her ambition of being a writer in the process, she attempts to push back-a resistance he resolves to break with violence and rape. At once the chronicle of an abusive marriage and a celebration of the invincible power of art, *When I Hit You* is a smart, fierce and courageous take on traditional wedlock in modern India.

A man who is kind to strangers, but can never extend his kindness to his wife. A man who frowns upon his wife's vacillating petit bourgeois poet- prostitute- female-writer ways. Finding mistake in all her actions uses small failures as excuses to hit her.

The nameless narrator faces horror and helplessness at the hands of her husband. She loses her individuality. She becomes what he wants her to be: She pleases him with her body, cooks whatever he likes, wears the clothes he chooses for her, removes herself from Facebook allows him to answer and delete her mails, stops combing her hair and on the whole stops being herself.

She is not only humiliated by her family but also by the society even by her appearance. It is her matter of survival. When it comes to sex she is expected to submit herself even without her concern. She lets her husband justify marital rape as the “pollution” of a body that had pre-marital sex. It’s not pain but the shame or the scarring that scares her. She realises that she cannot fight back nor teach him a lesson. The moment she realises this she feels defeated. She is being justified and denied by her parents who further deepen her wounds. She is often told that “It’s for your own good”.

Her husband teaches her lessons with brutality; her parents teach her lessons to cope up with brutality and wifeliness. She allows her unknown tormentor to build control over her body, brick by brick, bit by bit. It is not so easy for a woman to walk out of marriage. She speaks of the aftermath of walking out of her marriage- being questioned by the media and friends or in being judged by the cops when she files a complaint.

How can she, an educated, independent and a smart woman tolerate this? Shame, pride and a society in which everyone from parents to police expects a woman to put up and shut up force the realisation that only she can save herself. A question “What prevents a woman from walking out of an abusive relationship?” is one the author deals with, through a deep personal narration urgent and yet poetic. It is not just a story of the abuse that the unnamed narrator faces at the hands of her misogynist husband, but also a young writer faces in absolute isolation.

The novel throws light on how domestic violence isolates a person. It shows how leaving takes time, cunning and opportunity. Staying back takes obedience, fear and self-preservation. The abuse and terrorizing start out relatively small. The husband puts out burning match sticks on his skin till his wife acquiesces to his will. He wants her to delete her Facebook account. He wants her passwords. He doesn’t want her to write, but he writes. The narrator says: “In this marriage in which I’m beaten, he is the poet. And one of his opening lines of verse reads:

When I hit you,  
Comrade Lenin weeps.”

Like many stories of domestic violence this one highlights the isolation the perpetrator cultivates. After they are married she must leave her hometown Chennai to rainy Mangalore. She is a housewife who spends her days indoors. Her husband reads all her messages, does not allow her to speak too much over the phone. The narrator’s anguish isn’t visible to the world because she isn’t visible to the world.

The reason for her survival becomes a question mark. She writes letters to imaginary lovers and then deletes them before her husband is home. She recollects her past, she holds on to the memories of the person she used to be. She reads, writes and plots a way out. Her phone conversation with her parents charts a familiar response which is to try harder and harder at her marriage till they become afraid for her. The narrator forgives. She also seethes, defies and escapes.

She uses fierce words, sometimes to play with the abusive husband in order to avoid possible violence, other times to provoke him “I slip words between his ribs like stiletto knife.” She tells her tale of violence, which is a demon present only to diminish and reduce a woman; the woman is neither diminished nor reduced. She raises and discovers her dignity. ‘When I Hit You’ is a story that must be told and a story that must be read.

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