

HOME AS A CRIME SPACE: AN INSIGHT INTO MEENA KANDASAMY'S
WHEN I HIT YOU

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ABSTRACT

Home is the space where one feels the most secured and loved. However for women it is the space where they are victimized .Women bear physical, emotional and psychological violence behind the closed doors.This is reflected in literature too.This article brings forth how the home is a crime space with an insight to the novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* by Meena Kandasamy. The novel depicts the journey of a young woman who is in a bad marriage and how she has to face violence of all kinds and keep all of them as secret inside the closed door. Even when she tries to express it to the world, she finds no listener. However, at last she has to escape from her home to escape violence.

Keywords- Home, violence, crime, space, woman, society

Home is a word that associates with itself the feeling of love, safety, security, support, optimism and many more. In earlier times, home even used to be the birth place. It is from home that life begins, sprouts, blooms and then withers and then falls in peace. Home is the umbrella which endures the heat and the rain, the struggles and the failures. It absorbs our tiredness, caresses us, cradles us and provides us the warmth of wrapping in the arms.

Home is the epitome of solace for all but for girls, ladies and women it is a space where crime takes place against them. It's a space where they are the victim of violence. The space behind the door is not a private space for the feminine gender where they can experience their freedom or express their individuality. It's a place where they are hushed down to keep the crime of someone else silent. This space is private and so the violence, be it physical, emotional or psychological remains buried behind the door because whatever is private should not be revealed in the public. Violence takes its most aggressive form in the most peaceful place, home.

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization in the WRVH as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation".(WHO 2002)

In this article, I want to shed light on how violence starts even with the girl fetus in the sweetest place for everyone else, home. How home gives shelter not to the girl or to the woman but to violence. Violence transforms from one form to the other, changes its hands from one to the other.

This article focuses on 'Home as a Crime Space' with respect to Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*.

This novel is based on the experiences of a would be writer who is engaged in a bad marriage to a Professor. The novel depicts how she faces violence of all kinds in her home, how everyone else thinks that she is safe in her home and is enjoying her bitter-sweet newly married life, how everyone is assured of her happiness as she is married to a respected personality. Even when she tries to express herself to others she knows that she is not believed by anyone.

The protagonist of the novel is a free girl who waits for one true love in her life. She represents the romantic young girl who remains in her own world, feels elated by the thoughts of love and is in search of it. She aspires to be an author. She plays with her words, makes castles with them and wants everyone to be a witness to it. In her search for a true love, she finds many who passionately sighs for her. However she is mesmerized by the Professor who speaks of Communism and wants to be a true comrade. She falls in love with the magic of his ideas, his words, his logic ,his reason , his public speeches, his aura and his complete personality.

They marry. However her imaginative world is turned upside down in reality. She finds that the person she has married is double-faced. He is completely different in home and in public. At home he is the dominant master who wants submission from his wife and in public he is the one who rallies for equality, for the rights of women. Meena Kandasamy reveals how the four walls of the home becomes her world, how she remains cramped in it. It becomes a place where she faces not only physical abuse but a place where she is psychologically destroyed and emotionally crushed down.

'Primrose Villa, with its little walled garden, its two side entrances, has the quaint air of kept secrets.'(Kandasamy 13)

To her the home feels like a set where she acts like a perfect wife.

"In the middle of this, the house itself stands, small and self-contained, its well-defined boundaries in sharp contrast to the open, vibrant garden. It makes a perfect film set. And in some ways, that is how I think of it: it is easier to imagine this life in which I'm trapped as a film; it is easier when I imagine myself as a character. It makes everything around me appear less frightening; my experiences at a remove. Less painful, less permanent. Here, long before I ever faced a camera, I became an actress." (Kandasamy 13)

The home becomes a frightening place for her. Whatever she does, her husband finds faults in it. Her husband calls her a pseudo feminist, a petite middle class bourgeois and a whore. He finds faults in whatever she does, shuts her down with his dialectics and abuses her violently .Its not only physical abuse that torments her. She is forced to remain oblivious to her identity. She has to delete all her contacts. She disconnects herself from social media. She is also not able to use the internet as per her will .In the private place of home even, her privacy is interrupted. She cannot mail anyone. Her husband replies the mails in place of her. Loss of identity equals death. She faces death in life.

'There is no reason why you should be on Facebook. It's narcissism. It's exhibitionism. It's a waste of time. I've said this to you a thousand times.'(Kandasamy 34)

Her freedom of dressing is also curtailed. She lives like a slave whose wishes, desires and even imagination are in the control of the master. She is raped and the pain is unbearable. Here the rapist is none the else than the husband who sleeps beside her, for whom she cooks food, for whom she has to showcase her love and loyalty.

Giving birth to the child also does not remain at the will of the mother. She has to give birth to the child as a testimony to her loyalty, her duty towards her husband. She is forced to go to a doctor for medical treatment for bearing a child.

The love that she demanded is violently stamped out in the home. In the outer world everything seems normal but the storm goes on inside. In the public the things happening in the four walled home are kept as a secret. The husband plays the role of a proper son-in -law, blames her wife for his misery, portrays

his wife as the cause of his all drudgery and begs for sympathy. He plays the role of the victimized outside the home. The society also believes that whatever happens in the home should be kept within it as it is a private and no one should intrude in it. The society also does not asks the wife how she is.

“Conversations here follow the same pattern .An endless back-and-forth relay of absolute pointlessness. No question demands an honest answer. A question is asked as an exercise in formal behavior. Questions that are greetings. Questions that are placeholders. Questions that fill awkward gaps. Questions to suggest an interest that does not exist. Questions that pretend to listen. Never, ever a question that seeks to know.” (Kandasamy 43)

It is also because of the negligence of the society that the home remains a crime space and the woman is left alone to fight. In this novel the young wife saves herself from her husband’s abuse. Though there are very few cases where she is successful.

Globally, 35 per cent of women have ever experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, or sexual violence by a non-partner. (World Health Organization 2013)

137 women are killed by a member of their family every day.(United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 10)

At least 200 million women and girls, aged 15–49 years, have undergone female genital mutilation in 31 countries where the practice is concentrated.(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division 2020).

15 million adolescent girls worldwide, aged 15–19 years, have experienced forced sex.(UNICEF 73)

Even if she is successful, she goes through tremendous violence even in her own house where she is brought up. All the blame for an unsuccessful marriage is given to a girl.

“Listen, my dear. I know it is upsetting. 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. He revolves around one question: What if she loves somebody else?” (Kandasamy 37)

Her parents force her to bear it up and remain silent. As long as she is not extinguished, as long as the flame of equality, freedom, speech, self-respect, independent thinking burns in her she cannot be a good wife. Her parents make her understand that it is silence, submission and compliance which can make a good woman and a perfect wife. However her silence could also not save her. She was punished for being silent too.

“Fucking cheap whore.

Next time you taunt me with your silence I will tear your fucking cunt apart. Now say sorry, bitch. Say sorry. Yes. that’s it. You will remember this. You will never forget this lesson.”(Kandasamy 100)

When she tries to find help from police or the lawyers, its the same situation that she faces. Either she is blamed or she is advised to have been more patient.

In this novel *When I Hit You* we find that at last she chooses to escape even for her home. She moves beyond the boundary of the home.

“... *Cinema Paradiso* provided the answer. *Go away. Don’t come back.* It was an act of love. And so I finally followed his injunction. I moved as far away as my talent could take me. Here, the sound of my hard heels on secluded cobblestone streets tells me that I have come far away, that I no longer need to run.”(Kandasamy 141)

She does not get the soothing emotional shelter even in her home. She moves away to stay alone and where she stays cannot be called a home as it is without a family. It’s only she and the few materialistic objects which interact in that space. It’s her own heart which interacts with herself. She is in real terms left homeless and thus free of violence. For years a woman bears the pain of violent abuse physically and emotionally in a home. When she is bereft of a home she bears he pain of loneliness and craves for that love which home gives

to all barring a woman. Yet in her struggle, her finding her path alone ,she adorns herself with dignity that is wonderful, courage and spirit that is indomitable, dreams that are ready to fly, wishes that have wings.

This novel forces us to think if there can be a society where a woman can find all the support in her home, if she can really find a second home after her marriage and if really the home embraces her in the way as she is and provides her with all the love and care which she deserves.Someday,we as a society will understand that the home has doors and windows from which we can provide a helping hand to the one who is inside and is not able to come out, we as outsiders sometimes can make effort so that the inmates of the home opens the windows and allow the fresh air to come in, we should sometimes come out from own homes and take care about the well-being of the members of our neighborhood, we should show courage to discuss the things that happen within our homes and speak about them when it is needed.

This novel reveals that how home becomes a crime space. Along with this revelation it also gives a responsibility to us, the readers, and the society in turn to find a way to save the victim. The young woman who aspired to be a writer saved herself but her struggle brings forth the story of many who are strangled to death, who are burnt to death or who are beaten to death. It is high time to hear the sighs, the whispers, the cries and the screams inside the confinement of homes.

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