

Reading of Intertextuality in the Notions of Domestic Violence in Select Texts with Reference to Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

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Abstract

Intertextuality is a term used to describe how humans read and absorb textual information as a result of the development and interaction of texts. The purpose of this research is to present a theoretical exposition of intertextuality. As a result, the current research focuses on domestic violence, a well-documented social problem that impedes women's development in a variety of ways. The study's methodology is based on the intertextualistic narrative of several works, with a special emphasis on Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* in the context of Domestic Violence. The study's findings reveal that domestic violence has a vulnerable effect on women due to a range of characteristics, and the analysis of many texts in multiple dimensions suggest that, despite the women characters differing in their cultural medium and familial background, they are intimidated by their abusive husbands and are subjected to comparable types of violence worldwide.

Keywords: intertextuality, domestic violence, psychology, text

1. Introduction

Women in all countries, regardless of position, religion, age, ethnicity, or religion, face violence in almost every aspect of their lives, including family, school, employment, government institutions, and during times of conflict or crisis. Violence is present throughout women's life, affecting both girls and elderly women. Domestic abuse, sexual harassment and assault, early and forced marriage, forced prostitution, so-called "honour" crimes, and female genital mutilation are just some of the ways violence against women and girls manifests itself (Shahzadi et al., 2012). It has its roots in the gender inequity that women suffer from childhood till their later part of life. Many abusers feel that violence against women is acceptable or even encouraged by society. Women believe that abusers may act violently without being judged. It is one of the most common human rights violations, with long-term negative consequences for women, their communities, and society as a whole.

The definition of Domestic Violence (DV) changes according to different perceptual experiences, but in vernacular terms, it refers to the various forms of sufferings that occur in the domain of a familial system where one dominates and has the upper hand over the other partner. According to the US office and Violence against Women, Domestic Violence is defined as a "pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner". The meaning adds that DV "can happen to anyone, regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender", and can take many varieties including physical, emotional, sexual, economic abuse (Oram et al., 2017).

As many critics have pointed out, literature has the ability to show successful and dysfunctional relations more authentically than most other forms of popular culture, considering the length of a narrative enabling for more intricate discourse and characterisation. As such, fiction books may be a great tool for learning about domestic abuse, not only in a formal classroom context but also to casual readers (Eisenstadt et al., 2002, Rutherford, 2018).

The term "intertextuality" refers to a text's link to other texts in the larger "mosaic" of cultural activities and their

representation. An "intertext" provides a focal point within this system or network, while a text's "intertextual" possibilities and significance are determined by its interactions with other texts in the past, present, and future (Manyaka, 1998). The modification of a text's meaning by another text is known as intertextuality. The reader's interpretation of a book is influenced and reflected by the interconnections between similar or comparable works of literature.

The relationship between writings inflected by quotations and allusion is known as intertextuality (Van Zoonen, 2017; Fairclough, 1992). It's a literary method that establishes a "textual interdependence" and leads to linked knowledge in various works. Julia Kristeva, a literary critic, claimed in the 1960s that intertextual connections could be found in various genres of literature—that separate texts arose because of their relationship to earlier literary writings. The Bakhtinian theory that every word is strongly interdependent with what has previously been stated within a socio-political textual environment is the basis for Kristeva's concept of intertextuality.

These references are used to sway the reader's opinion and add layers of complexity to a text based on the reader's prior information and comprehension. The structure of influence, in turn, is dependent on the structure of intertextuality (Juvan, 2008; Bazerman, 2003). It's also a literary discourse method that authors use in novels, poetry, theatre, and even non-written works. An author borrowing and changing a previous work is an example of intertextuality, as is a reader referencing one book while reading another (Alfaro, 1996). Not relating to the word "reference," with which it is strongly associated, "intertextuality" lacks a verb form and hence has wide designating powers, but it does not describe a specific type of literary activity (Briggs and Bauman, 1992). Leavy emphasised the importance of literature as a qualitative approach source, describing it as providing a unique perspective events and people's everyday lives, as well as a potential to address multiple meanings and a source of profound contemplation that is available to a larger audience (Leavy, 2012).

Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the intertextualistic phenomena of domestic violence's consequences on physical, psychological, economic, and sexual elements through the autobiographical work of renowned Indian writer Meena Kandasamy. Autobiographical fiction is a good stepping stone for intersectional analysis, as it is concretely interconnected to reality. When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife (2017) by Meena Kandasamy depicts a young anonymous narrator as a writer-wife in a four-month-and-eight-day relationship with a University Lecturer who is also a staunch Libertarian. Her command of poetic prose, as well as her daring and forthrightness as a woman writer, are all demonstrated in the work. The work is based on the author's personal experience with an abusive marriage. This narrative is a feminist treatise about self-discovery and providing a voice to those who don't have one. This autobiography is a scathing analysis of a woman's position in current Indian culture, particularly the so-called privileged elites in terms of societal order. This work, which was recognized for the Women's Prize for Fiction and other significant accolades, examines the evil nature of the patriarchal ego as symbolised by the antagonist professor's character, and how writing functions as a liberating power for the protagonist.

2. Review of Literature

Each country has its own set of aspects that influence to the type of domestic violence in that country (Walker, 1999). Acceptance of domestic abuse, women's low social standing, repressive governmental systems, oppressive core spiritual beliefs that undervalue women, civil wars, and the presence of states of war all give to the current incidence rates of violent crime in those nations that are different from others (Walker, 1999). A similar study indicates, wife-beating is frequent throughout all social classes since it "is a representation of the power dynamic between a husband and wife," mirroring a woman's secondary social rank (Chaudhuri and Morash, 2019). This demonstrates Interpersonal violence covers a variety of forms of abuse targeting children, adults, and the elderly, including material, psychological and sexual, abuse.

The study by Ahuja identified beating, striking, pulling hair, forceful exertions, assaulting with an object, threatening to strangle, and intimidating were the most common kinds of violence (Ahuja, 1998, Ghammaz et al., 2020). Verbal abuse, caustic remarks in the presence of strangers, putting significant limits on freedom of movement, completely disregarding the wife in decision-making processes, and lodging frequent complaints about her to her parents, friends, neighbours, and kin, much to the wife's humiliation, were all discovered to exist. Violence can result in death in severe circumstances, such as suicides and killings. In a study of 120 dowry deaths in India, all the women were under the age of 25. 46% of the women died as a result of burns, while 34% perished as a result of drowning (WHO, 2000).

Ranjana Kumari (1989) found that one out of every four dowry victims committed suicide in a study on dowry violence. Violence is linked to a significant number of maternal deaths on the Indian subcontinent, according to

research. Domestic violence has a tragically terrible conclusion, as seen by media reports detailing a continual flow of homicides against victims, their children, relatives or friends, those attempting to protect them, innocent victims, and perpetrators.

Domestic violence research is beginning to uncover a variety of qualities that are associated to both participating in and avoiding domestic violence (Hariharasudan & Thavabalan, 2017). Unemployment, low educational attainment, economic ability, resentment, alcoholism, substance abuse, and living in a large extended family have all been linked in international studies to a greater probability of domestic violence (Martin et al., 1999; Xingjuan, 1999). According to Strauss (1980), excessive consumption of alcohol by the male partner is connected with an increased chance of domestic violence.

In terms of education, the study by Ahuja (1998), illustrates that there is no significant relationship between beating and the couple's educational qualification. Husbands beat educated women exactly as much as those who are illiterate or less educated. According to several studies, one-fourth of batterers (24%) were moderately educated, while one-fourth (26%) were highly educated (Ahuja, 1998).

Regarding the structure of family, the study by Visaria (1999) explores, Women who are subjected to domestic abuse early in their marriage are still subjected to it as they get older. Family structure, the existence or absence of children, and the size of the family have little relevance to deal with wife battering. Similarly, Wife battering is unrelated to family income, husband's occupation, or women's work, according to the study. According to Visaria (1999) survey findings, a family system provides considerable safety for women and works as a hindrance to spouses who use physical force to dominate them.

According to different studies, close relatives, particularly members of the husband's family, play a significant role in the perpetration of violence against women (Devi Prasad, 1990; Fernandez, 1997). The abuser is almost always the husband, with the help of the mother-in-law. Other members of the husband's family, including his brother-in-law and sister-in-law, have been discovered to actively participate in and abet the abuse (Devi Prasad, 1990). Children who experience violence are one of the most vulnerable groups. Behavioural and emotional issues such as fretfulness, sadness, poor self, poor academic achievement, defiance, hallucinations, and physical health difficulties are more common in these youngsters.

Several studies highlighted the use of fictional studies in better understanding and visualizing of the concept. To comprehend the complexity of Domestic Violence, the study by Rybakova and et al., address the benefits of utilizing narratives to instruct about social justice concerns, noting that "literature, allows us to see people as they truly are: multifaceted, good, wicked, and sometimes paradoxical in their words and actions" (Rybakova et al., 2013).

Domestic violence has received a great deal of attention in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict studies, as well as in movie, television, literature, and other forms of popular culture. There has also been an upsurge in popular culture coverage of domestic abuse, according to studies (Pandeewari, Hariharasudan & Nawaz, 2021). According to McCall, between 2004 and 2009, the prevalence of portrayals of domestic violence on premier television surged by 120 percent, as did the violent nature of these depictions (McCall, 2009).

Women's Violence, in its various manifestations, has been addressed in literary studies as a challenging subject within the framework of fictitious trauma (Kaur and Garg, 2008). It is a setting that focuses on violence against women in relation to patriarchal ideologies and power dynamics (Heise, 2010), emphasizing the importance of the individuality of experiences of women.

According to Banks (2008), literary narrative is not fully "fictional" because it is authored by real people and is based on real life experiences. Furthermore, as Leavy (2012) argues, the majority of writers use social scientific data and engage themselves in the social science experience in order to develop novels that are realistic. According to Stark and Polletta (2007), a better knowledge of domestic abuse and better solutions can be achieved by presenting new tales and using new narratives. Stories can affect long-term attitudes on social issues, but the most persuasive are not those that are overly unequivocal, but rather those that underscore the daily struggles of sustaining an abusive relationship.

From the review of available literature, Domestic Violence is a well-documented societal abuse, and the representation of Domestic Violence in literature aids in a better comprehension of the dynamic pattern of envisioning the abuse (Hariharasudan & Pandeewari, 2020). Domestic Violence in literature has received scant attention in fictional studies, and no earlier study based on intertextuality phenomena relevant to Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* was produced, thereby bridging the research gap identified.

3. Methodology

Domestic violence happens when the perpetrator and the victim are familiar with each other. It can happen in both adult and teenage relationships. Both the victim and the perpetrator could be dating, living together, married, divorced, or separated. They are heterosexual, homosexual, or lesbian. It's possible that they have children in common. The relationships between the couple can last for a short period of time or for an extensive phase of time. Accordingly, the methodology of the study incorporates intertextualistic features of domestic violence in terms of physical, psychological, economical and sexual aspects with regards to notable Indian writer Meena Kandasamy's autobiographical work *When I Hit You Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017) and other popular works.

3.1 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can have long-term consequences for your physical and mental well-being. Any physically hostile behaviour, withholding of bodily needs, indirect physically hurtful action, or the fear of physical violence is considered physical abuse. It can lead to a variety of chronic (long-term) health issues, such as heart disease, hypertension, and digestive issues. Physical assaults may or may not result in injury. An apparently minor kind of physical violence, such as a shove or kick, can sometimes end in the most traumatic injuries. Women who have been assaulted are more prone to endure from despair, anxiety, or eating disorders (Hariharasudan & Gnanamony, 2017). Withholding physical requirements, like as sleep or meals, refusing money, food, transportation, or support if sick or injured, isolating the victim in or out of the house, threatening with weapons, refusing to offer or rationing supplies, abusing, harming, or threatening to injure others, such as children, pets, or valuable items are all examples of this. This is very well exemplified in the following lines, "Today it is my arms that he is punching, but tomorrow it will be my hair that he will wind around his palm to drag me through the rooms, the next day it will be my backbone that will endure a shattering blow, the day after that it will be my head on which his angry fist will descend" (Kandasamy, 2017).

Battered women are not the only ones who suffer injuries; abusers also suffer self-inflicted injuries and defence wounds. Women tend to suffer severe injuries in heterosexual relationships since they are the prime victims of domestic abuse. This can be seen in the following lines:

"My scars are my secrets. My straight shoulders sometimes slump; I wish my breasts would disappear. My hair falls out in handfuls, a shame like no other for a woman, one that can barely be admitted to even the closest of friends. Every hairstyle is a style to hide. My back hurts from sitting for long hours. My cracked heels map the idea of a woman who does not have time for herself. The real body is militating against me, hurtling towards disease and age" (Kandasamy, 2017).

Similarly, the incidents of physical abuse can be seen in *Safe Haven*, a novel authored by Nicholas Sparks, has been popular in America. *Safe Haven* has sold over a numerous scopies worldwide and has been interpreted into various languages. The novel follows Zahra, who is constantly afraid of her father, a man who persecutes his daughter and wife. Her father is well-known as a devout Muslim who constantly prays and urges people to follow Islamic law. Zahra wished to marry someone she adored and who would protect her from her father's unfair behavior. Her goal was crushed, however, when she married Majid, a carbon copy of her abusive father. Shalan's portrayal of Zahra provided a clear critique of the stereotypes, marginalization, gender inequity, and ongoing cycle of female subjugation that exist in Jordan's male dominated world (Hariharasudan, 2020). This can be seen in the following lines, "He couldn't remember breaking two of her fingers, even though it was obvious that he had. But he wouldn't let her go to the hospital for a week, not until the bruises on her face could be covered by makeup and she'd had to cook and clean one-handed" (Sparks, 2011).

3.2 Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse is defined as the repeated and intentional use of a variety of words and non-physical behaviours with the intent to manipulate, injure, weaken, or intimidate a person emotionally and mentally; and/or warp, confuse, or affect a person's ideas and actions in their daily life, causing them to lose their sense of identity and harming their wellness. Kandasamy states, "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 my life while we live under the same roof" (Kandasamy, 2017).

Many abusers think they have the right to employ coercive tactics on their relationships, and they frequently find social support for their beliefs. The "family" character of these connections sometimes provides social, if not legal, legitimacy to the perpetrator to use abuse. This is very well expressed by Kandasamy as follows:

"I'm the battered woman, but he is the one who is playing the role of a victim. I have watched him play all the roles. The doting husband in the presence of his colleagues, the harassed victim of a suspicious wife to his male friends, the

unjustly emasculated man to my female friends, the pleading son-in-law to my parents. The role of would-be-murderer, however, is new” (Kandasamy, 2017).

This is also seen in the character of Catherine in *Into the Darkest Corner*, when Catherine seeks assistance from the officials in order to escape her abusive husband. Later, she discovers that even the higher authorities are on her husband's side, presuming she is psychologically unstable. Regarding Catherine's lack of support and protection from higher authorities, Catherine provided insight on this debilitating part of her situation, saying:

“I had nowhere to go. I couldn't call the police, could I? He was one of them. They would look at me, and he would invent some story about me being traumatized by some incident he'd been working undercover on, how I was showing signs of mental illness and he'd been trying to help me” (Haynes, 2012).

While the abuser, typically the man, is allowed to live his life freely, it is always the woman, the victim who is frequently chastised by society's double standards. This can be seen through the following lines:

“These are the ones who fault him for bringing up a headstrong daughter, for educating her too much, for bringing her up like a son, for not disciplining her enough, for sending her to study away from home without any supervision, for allowing this whirlwind marriage to take place, for not consulting them when the whirlwind marriage started to blow itself out, and for being a hen-pecked husband who listens too much to his wife and daughter” (Kandasamy, 2017).

These incidents from the above illustrates the lack of authoritative support both from internal and external factors renders survivors of marital violence paralyzed since they constantly doubt that taking formal counteraction against their perpetrators would be of any value.

3.3 Economic Abuse

Economic abuse happens when one intimate partner has influence over the other's access to financial opportunities, reducing the victim's ability to sustain themselves and forcing them to economically involved on the abuser. By restraining the victim's access to financial resources, the perpetrator has few options for leaving an abusive or violent relationship. Limiting a spouse or partner from obtaining resources, such as impeding their ability to find work, keep their positions, or advance in their careers, and attain assets, as well as prohibiting the victim from gaining an education, are all examples of economic violence. During emotional abuse, contradictory behavior or words are utilized to perplex and frighten the victim. These behaviours cause victims to question themselves, leading them to assume that they are the ones who are abusing them or that they are to blame. Women and men who have witnessed emotional abuse are more likely to suffer from depression, which increases their risk of suicide, poor eating habits, and drug and alcohol addiction.

This can be seen in the words of Kandasamy, “I have stopped asking him to help me find a job. I believe myself anymore. Having a job becomes one of many vague things that I want to do in my life but see little way of attaining. I realize my husband does not hate anything in this universe as much as the idea of a writer” (Kandasamy, 2017).

Similarly, in the novel, “*Into the Darkest Corner*” by Elizabeth Haynes, economic abuse can be seen in the character of Catherine where she describes her husband's controlling practices, stating: “Things got better when I told him I was thinking of taking a sabbatical from work. I did it as a safety precaution; if anyone from work phoned, or if I let something slip, it would give me an explanation to fall back on. And of course he'd always wanted me to give up work, right from the start” (Haynes, 2012).

This incident exemplifies that Lee was able to ensure that Catherine would never fight his persecution because of his financial control over her, as she would lack the ability to sustain any prospective opposition. The victims of the aforementioned cases exemplify the character of women who are enslaved by male dominance through violence. The many forms of violence that the female characters encounter from their husbands are used to keep them meek, subservient, and manageable.

3.4 Sexual Abuse

Some of the perpetrators abuse their victims sexually. Sexual battering encompasses a wide range of behaviors, including forced intercourse when the victim does not desire intimacy. Statistics reveal that women are most prone to rape in the Indian subcontinent indicating that India is the most dangerous country as far as the number of rape cases is concerned. As of 2016, 10.9% of the crimes committed against women were for rape. Marital rape is yet another prominent example of violence against women. Marital rape is the nonconsensual sexual intercourse carried on between married couples that leads to a great deal of abuse and physical molestation committed upon the female body. Rape is typically the sexual intercourse carried on with the woman without her consent. Rapes and

nonconsensual sexual activities form a large portion of the violence committed against Indian women. Similarly, Kandasamy's husband uses sexual violence as a weapon to subdue her. The horror and plight of Meena Kandasamy's violent marital abuse can be seen through the lines as she says, "He is lifting me by my hair alone. All the blood is rushing to my head. I can imagine my vagina falling out of me like spare change ... Rape is a fight you did not win. You could not win. Death is all that I can think about when I lie there" (Kandasamy, 2017).

Similarly, in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*, the protagonist, Saru explains her predicament as well as her sexual encounter with her spouse.:

"The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognise. Total non-comprehension, complete bewilderment, paralyzed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength which overwhelmed me" (Deshpande, 1990).

Saru's position is described in this manner. She is in the midst of an enforced sexual engagement, which has become a huge topic in Indian culture. These examples illustrate how marital rape has become a big problem. A male views a woman to be a sex object and is unconcerned about their partner's permission. These occurrences have exposed a male-dominated society and major challenges that are eroding women's identities on a daily basis.

4. Discussion

Gender discrimination is a serious problem for a woman whose identity is being questioned. Gender discrimination has long been a big part in shaming women's identities. Biological distinctions are used to assess women (Priyadarshini, Mohan, Hariharasudan & Sangeetha, 2021). The major manifestations that describe the socioeconomic circumstances are built on biological variations. Although women have gained some autonomy in postmodern society, they are still yearning for their individuality, that has been squandered in their ignorance, isolation, and solitude (Ghammaz, 2020). As a result, a woman should not be evaluated on the terms of her gender, as this degrades her. Patriarchal society has to realize that women are biologically distinct from men, yet they are not the weaker sex. Several stereotypes perceived by men on women must be altered (LeGates, 2001). Also, beliefs about traditional myths that cause shame to women should be dispelled in order to improve women's empowerment. In these conflicts, education aids in the dismantling of ideologies.

Accordingly, the sorrow and turmoil of modern educated middle-class women are shown in these select novels with special reference to Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*. These circumstances focus on the repercussions and situations, as well as the psyche of middle-class women in their personal lives, workplaces, and personal lives (Pandeewari, Hariharasudan & Kot, 2021). Their anxieties, hardships, disappointments, and frustrations are all depicted honestly. The authors expose the various forms of oppression, including sexual oppression, as well as the struggle of women for personality and self-identity.

In terms of Domestic violence, it can only be prevented if male dominance is eliminated and culturally imposed roles are avoided. When the customary and imposed cultural implications fade away, liberation of women will begin to flourish. Domestic violence has a susceptible impact on women because of these features, and they are affected in their condition since it deals with a woman's psychological torment, which reveals their dilemma, the sorrow of a restrained woman in a deeper context.

5. Conclusion

The study focuses on the intertextual phenomena of domestic violence, which is an internationally established problem with a discrete pattern of offending actions directed towards a victim rather than a single incident. The study compares many texts, with a particular focus on Meena Kandasamy's autobiographical narrative, *When I Hit You*, in the setting of a sequence of violent actions that arise as a result of various events in the relationship. The study's methodology reveals the intertextualistic phenomenon of Domestic violence in the form of physical, psychological, economic, and sexual assault. According to the study's findings, domestic violence research focuses primarily on perpetrators, whereas concentrating on abusive partners can help researchers better understand the prolonged health repercussions of domestic abuse. The study has several limitations because it only looks at the intertextual phenomenon of novels written in English. The limits of the current study provide scope and recommend future investigations in the areas of feminism, linguistic issues, structuralism, and cultural diversity for future research.

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