



## CREATION OF 'SELF' THROUGH LIBERAL FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVE IN MEENA KANDASAMY'S WHEN I HIT YOU: OR A PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER AS A YOUNG WIFE

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### ABSTRACT:

Since immemorial time, women have been enduring the pain the men inflicted on her. Violation of her rights by men is not new experience. India is the place where Goddess is revered and women are relegated. The constitution of India has adopted the provision of right to equality and non-discrimination in Article 14 and article 15 which render opportunities to women as par to men. State is obliged to ensure the rights which render equality between men and women irrespective of class, gender, sex, religion, marital status, social and cultural differences. .

This paper aims to underscore the liberal feminist approach with an insight of Meena Alexander's When I Hit You: Or a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife. Liberal Feminist legal theory advocate formal equality in law which ensure the equal and similar treatment to women. The novel revolves around the protagonist's confrontation and her flight from the phallogocentric husband. The narrator who aspires to be writer gets trapped in the abusive marriage where she lost her individuality and identity. This paper throws light on her incessant efforts to entrench her identity and her transcendence from the phallogocentric society.

**Key words:** -violation, women rights, liberal feminist, phallogocentric, abusive marriage, transcendence.

Liberal feminism, also called mainstream feminism, is a main branch of feminism defined by its focus on achieving gender equality through political and legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy. Liberal feminism focus on women's suffrage movement and women's access to education and equality. It emerged from the political philosophy of liberalism centered on human beings' capacity for rationality and reason and their natural rights to liberty. (Baily). It has stated great importance on equal laws, access to education and political institutions and refuse to it is considered as the major hindrance for the empowerment of women.

Proponent of liberal feminism Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill started women suffrage movement in UK and USA. Mary

Wollstonecraft's Vindication of Rights of women and John Stuart Mill's Subjugation of Women sow the seeds of liberal feminism based on the formal equality. Liberal feminist strive to achieve formal equality, arguing that women and men are alike and both must be treated as par. "Specifically, this meant that the rights assigned to men as legal subjects should be made available to women whenever a comparison between the two revealed a disparity." (Sagade) Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of Rights of Woman is a classic text that spurs the concept of feminist thought. It was a response to the debate on women's conduct and education. She asserts that there is no fundamental difference between men and women, except for their social environment. (Mukhipadhyay) . She urges for equal education and similar opportunities for

women and criticizes the differences based on sex. She exhorts middle class women who are not mired in drudgery of poverty and uncorrupted, become independent economically to change the status quo of women. She asserts that ‘I don’t wish women to have power over men: but over themselves’ (Wolstonecraft) In the text ,she gave an importance to women’s education that would develop the reason and cultivate the ‘self’. She professed that if women are given equal opportunities and free her from the social constraints, they will actualize their full personhood.

John Stuart Mill’s Subjugation of Women advocates equality for women in society. He asserts that women position in marriage is like a slave. “He believed that improved condition for women would ensure that they were no longer victims of abusive husband but equal partners in a marital relationship” (Mukhipadhyay). He envisages the equality for women which would create the family as a model of the ‘virtues of freedom’. Mill stated the major cause of subordination of women as the assumption of her inferiority with respect to men.

MeenaKandasamy, in When I Hit You, addressed the suppressed position women in patriarchal society and her strive to create her ‘self’ and ‘individuality’ after her marriage with the university professor. Constitution of India in article 14 and article 15 advocate equality and non -discrimination irrespective sex, gender, caste, marital status, religion etc. “The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex and gender are priority objectives of the women’s human rights framework.” (Sagade, WOMEN’S HUMAN) . As women are conferred with equality and non-discrimination, they can pursue any profession. Narrator as well-educated woman aspire to be a writer but toxic masculinity of her

husband forbid her from becoming writer. Before marriage she nurture romantic notion about love marriage but when she gets married she realized pretentious face of her husband. In public he strives for the equality and non-discrimination against women but at home he behaves like dominant master who wants submission from his wife. Home is the secured place where one can exercise their rights but for women it becomes prison where all types ordeal inflicted on her.

When narrator started writing article, her husband called petite middle class bourgeois and a whore. He insists her to deactivate facebook and deleted all the mails. He forces her to cut her connection from social media. He said:

‘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)

When narrator narrates physical and mental torture her husband inflicted on her, her parents, instead of scolding to the professor, they started consoling to the narrator. They suggested her to bear brunt of pain. It is clear through their consolation that women are considered sole responsible for the divorce and parent cannot bear the shame divorcee daughter brings at home.

“Conformity and non-conformity are relative terms. Non-conformist are those who rebel against the accepted and existing moral codes and social norms, challenges the injustice and demand redress” (Bai) Due to Indian women’s passive and self sacrificing behavior , they always brood over the collective goodness of the family. With the advent of western education in India, changes in the attitude of women are observed. Women exhort for the respectable position in Indian culture and their incessant effort to gain equal place as par the man. “Modern women find no sense in being an acquiescent, suffering and sacrificing lot.

(Bai). They started questioning the conventions and defying tradition which are levied on her through patriarchy.

Narrator tells about the difficulties when she was forbidden to write any article, she types the article on her mobile Nokia E63 and send it to publisher. Writing was the only medium through which she could create her own identity. It is the reading and writing that can transform meek women into rebellious consciousness. Words allow her to free from the restraint. She started typing letter to the unknown lover and delete it before her husband's arrival. Her defiance to her husband conventional notion marks her transcendence to new women. Though her husband deleted 26000 of her mails, force her to isolate from the social media, she is strong-minded that she finds her way into the world of writing.

“As long as a woman cannot speak, as long as those to whom she speaks do not listen, the violence is unending”

Narrator tells us the story of her journey through the structure of toxic masculinity and patriarchy. Patriarchy play pivotal role to perpetuate the violence to subordinate women. When professor realized the failure of his argument to subjugate narrator he applied the physical violence to dominate her. Her father tells her to avoid confrontation and her mother's endeavor to sustain the conjugal relationship of her daughter is seen when narrator is told that “Marriage is a give and take” (Kandasamy) . But narrator use words as weapon and strike on her husband. “Our narrator uses her words fiercely, sometimes to play along with the abusive husband in order to avoid possible violence, other times to provoke him. Her words are her only shield weapons. “I slip words between his ribs like a stiletto knife”. (Kashyap)

Liberal feminist strive to get equal opportunities and rights of education irrespective of gender and sex. Narrator also wants to go Kerala to complete her five-year integrated MA degree. But

her father was reluctant to send her to Kerala. First thought of discrimination is reflected in his mind when he says that Kerala is not suitable place for his daughter education. He says ,

“Everyone from Kerala comes here to study, but our unique daughter decides to go there. What can I do?’ My father's intermittent grumbling was amplified by my mother who spoke non-stop about sex-rackets, ganja, alcoholism and foreign tourists, making Kerala – a demure land of lagoons and forty rivers – appear more and more like Goa.” (Kandasamy)

Definition of the ideal wife is conferred to those women who can conceive the baby and those who are reluctant to become mother are always beaten and relegated. Professor was the only heir to continue the lineage but narrator reluctance to bring the baby of person who beats and torture her every day is observed. Narrator says,

“I don't want to bring into the world a son who will watch his mother being beaten up. I do not want to bring into the world a daughter who will be beaten up” (Kandasamy 200)

To escape from the pregnancy, narrator has made the kitchen as her battleground where she has kept the vegetable and fruits that would help her to not conceive baby. Every woman has a right to life where she can decide the ways to lead her life. It must be her decision to conceive the baby but in patriarchal society only men opinion are taken as supreme and her opinions are never taken into account. But narrator finds her way to flee away from the patriarchy.

Narrator was standing on such position where she is left with only two options- ‘flight or fight’. She knows that woman cannot fight physically and cannot overpower him. When Professor realize that her wife knows everything about his failed marriage, he tries to dominate her by inflicting physical violence on her. Narrator realizes her victory over her husband. When she expose her husband's hypocrisy of being revolutionary, he hold her neck tightly and

started to strangle her. Realizing her defiance to his toxic masculinity, he free her from his grip. “He takes his hand away and I collapse. My lungs heaven and struggle for air, but when I took up at him and defiantly smile” (Kandasamy 211)

Individuality and self is an implication of defiance to his torture, hypocrisy. Since her marriage she tries to be ideal wife revered by society. As she realizes his hypocrisy, she start rebelling against his torture. In India socio-Cultural practices which advocate patriarchy perpetuate violence on women. Hope holds her back with her husband in marriage and anticipating that with time everything would be normal.

“Hope prevents me from taking my own life. Hope is the kind voice in my head that prevent me from fleeing .Hope is the traitor that chains me to this marriage” (Kandasamy 182)

But regular torture never let her to actualize her dream of being writer. She expects the world where her husband, society and her parents assist her to realize her dream. She attempted successfully to champion the cause of gender equality though her polemical writing. When her efforts go futile, she becomes strong-minded to pursue her on herself. Her defiance and departure from her husband marks her own self. She like free bird can now follow her ambition to become writer.

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