

The Crisis Of Intimate Partner Violence In India: The Reading Of Selected Works By Tamil Writers Bama And Meena Kandasamy

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ABSTRACT

The lack of effective communication, emotional distance, and sexual discontent cause problems among married couples. Recent studies show that greater distress is seen among married women when compared to that of men. Any toxic behaviour within an intimate partner relationship that results in physical torture, psychological distress, or sexual abuse is called IPV or Spousal Violence. This research attempts to study how the culture of silence is promoted and spousal violence is normalized to an extent that the victims are reluctant to openly share their horrific tales of intimate partner violence. In the novels *When I Hit You* and *Sangati*; the readers come across an evident, but invisible power struggle that results in toxic interdependence, which holds back the victims from walking out of an abusive relationship. Abusive marriage and loneliness put women at higher risk of depression, anxiety, hypertension, and stress disorders. It affects their mental, physical and emotional well-being. Distorted perceptions and fall of self-esteem are reported in married women who suffer from severe abuse and isolation.

Keywords: Marriage, Distress, Silence, Violence, Struggle, Abuse, Relationship, Power

Introduction

When a pattern of abusive behaviours is showcased by one or both partners in an intimate relationship, it is deemed as intimate partner violence or spousal abuse. IPV includes physical aggression, threats, sexual and emotional abuse, domineering partnership, intimidation, stalking, and economic deprivation. Alcohol consumption and mental illnesses present additional challenges to this pattern of abuse. Intimate Partner Violence is of universal concern as it is associated with considerable mental and physical morbidity. Indian women who are victims of IPV undergo physical, mental issues and also exhibit suicidal tendencies.

Women are more prone to Intimate Partner Violence due to the existing gender stereotypes and inequalities prevalent in the society. The fear that the resistance or response of the victim may instigate the aggressive abuser, and thereby cause pain or harm to the victim or the family may be one of the major reasons why these cases of abuse are not brought into the limelight. Victims choose to suffer in silence as they are scared of the repercussion of divorce and separation from their kids. Societal blame, biases, and prejudices, lack of financial independence and familial support are some of the other influential factors that make women extremely vulnerable to violence.

Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the contemporary relevance of the topic of Intimate Partner Violence in South India and its possible causes with reference to the works *When I Hit You* and *Sangati*. The various types of abuse that the victims have to endure and the trauma in women due to abuse and violence as reflected in the selected works by Bama and Kandasamy are analysed. The societal attitudes, expectations of marriage in a South Indian setting, and the reasons why the victims choose to suffer in silence are also taken into consideration.

Literature Review

Many researchers have studied the themes of female sexuality, the concept of marriage, familial power struggle, domestic violence, and divorce laws. The related research attempts worth mention are the research papers *Domestic violence in India - An analysis* by Vimal Vidushy, Gagandeep Sethi; *When a Violated Body Strikes/Writes Back: Unveiling the Violence in Meena Kandasamy's When I Hit You*, co-authored by Priyanka Tripathi and Partha Bhattacharjee. These papers deal with the crisis of violence in a domestic circle while the current research paper distinctively focuses on the Role of Intimate Partner Violence in causing marital distress. *From Subjugation to Liberation: A Critical Study of Bama's Karukku* by Asst. Prof. Jeyamatha explores the role of Bama's Karukku and Sangati in contributing to the new trends of Dalit literature. The study celebrates the pride and dauntless spirit of the Dalit women whereas it doesn't provide a detailed study on spousal violence in particular and the associated marital distress.

The article *Intimate Partner Sexual Assault: The trauma of being assaulted or raped in a relationship* by Beverly Engel ascertains the relevance of awareness on the global crisis of intimate partner violence. The researchers have been successful in dealing with the resistance of sexism in literature, but the study of women in literature who suffer due to spousal violence isn't given much prominence. There is a paucity of research on intimate partner violence within the South Indian context through the analysis of the rhetoric or narrative. Thus, a research gap is yet to be filled as none of the selected works are studied to examine the effects of spousal violence in a South Indian setting.

Analysis

Sangati, a novel by Bama is a first-person narrative that presents the individual stories, anecdotes, and personal experiences of the women in the Paraya Community. It is a narrative that deals with the bitter experiences of several generations of married women in the community. It incorporates the themes of growth, decline, culture, and liveliness of Dalit women and highlights the unspoken agonies, merciless abuse faced by them within their families. *Sangati* examines the differences between women, their needs, how they are subjected to abuse and oppression within their marriages. The novel universalizes the pain and problems of the women discriminated against on the grounds of untouchability, domestic roles and gender.

When I Hit You or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife by Meena Kandasamy is also notable for its frank and candid depiction of an unhappy marriage. Being a woman activist, Kandasamy has been vocal about the violence and discrimination against women. She uses her writing as a weapon against the society that compels women to settle into the stereotypical roles assigned to them and anonymized her narrator to universalize her experiences. Her abusive and emotionally manipulative wedlock that only lasted for four months had adverse effects on her, as a woman, an individual and most importantly as a writer. Despite being educated, the protagonist of the novel is heavily assaulted, forcefully silenced and deliberately isolated by her spouse. It is a horrifying and gripping narrative of abuse, violence and isolation that protagonist had to face after moving into a new city after marriage.

The Tamil Dalit writer Bama elucidates several issues faced by women at their own homes within the community like spousal violence, sexual harassment, isolation, abandonment post-marriage, and indifference. The novel *Sangati* reflects the sufferings of Dalit women in an abusive marriage. It proposes to examine the lives of different Dalit women and how they are subjected to oppression and the sufferings right from their infancy.

It depicts physical violence and abuse against women in intimate relationships as a major cause for concern.

Sangati reveals different aspects of intimate partner violence as it focuses on the complexities of various forms of spousal abuse such as physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and verbal violence. Even pregnant women are subjected to brutal assault and physical torture without mercy. The women's parents are mostly indifferent to the horrifying events of spousal violence as they believed she is destined to obey and live under her husband after marriage. Most of the women characters in the novel don't dare to defy their abusive spouses as they are scared of the possible torture and dire consequences that might follow: "For many women who chose to keep quiet, the reason could be fear of retaliation, loss of a job or that they might have to continue in the same situation with a man who will become even more vengeful." (Panicker) The conversations between these women about their everyday struggles in the marriage are the only possible way they share their sense of disappointment, feeling of disgust, fear of torture, and their anger or resistance.

The women in the narrative are sexually harassed, objectified, and exploited by their partners. Women do not resist this coercive initiation of sexual intercourse and are petrified about the possible effects of their actions. They are forced to surrender their bodies to their husbands after tiresome physical labour and household chores. The husband's pleasure is prioritized over the woman's pain, tiredness, discomfort, denial, and emotions. "He killed her outrageously ... Because the man was crazy with lust. Because he wanted her every single day, how could she agree to his frenzy after she worked all hours of the day and night." (10)

The women are also perturbed due to the lack of responsibility, unemployment, squander, infidelity, and alcoholism in men. In their households, women face pressure from their partners and are expected to contribute to household production and reproduction. Husbands who are alcoholics or adulterous did not earn enough for their households. These men were not held accountable for their reckless actions and neglectful behaviours towards their families. The women are tormented and assaulted murderously to snatch away the money she had earned to take care of the family: "Everywhere the strap fell on her light skin, there was bright red weal. Even now I remember the way he flung her down and was treading on her beating her at the same time." (42) The financial burden of running the family is solely rested upon the women's shoulders as their partners do not take any initiative to provide for the kids or look after the family.

The writer also presents strong women like Kaaliamma who resist physical violence in a quarrelsome marriage. She is not portrayed as a feeble woman who suffers helplessly at the hands of her abusive husband but dares to fight back. She did not want to suffer in silence and reacted to physical assault and violence in the very same manner. The woman Pecchi showed enough courage to put an end to her abusive marriage. She was determined to not live with her violent partner anymore and opted to remarry, to start afresh. She was not afraid to do as her community supported her during her separation and remarriage which is a rare and unc customary practice in a rural South Indian setting.

Raakkamma resists vile and vulgar domination by her husband with the help of obscene language. She hurls back abuses, screams, shrieks, and curses her husband to save herself from his clutches during the violent quarrels. She shouts obscenities as an act to resist her violent spouse and to draw the attention of the people nearby, with the hope that they might intervene due to the clamour. The characters of Kaaliaamma, Pecchi, and Raakkamma represent the women who come out victorious in resisting their abusive spouses: "How dare you kick me, you low life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair? Disgusting man...After this Paakkiraj walked off, still shouting." (61)

On the other hand, the narrator in Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* grows tired of her monotonous life of rules and restraints in the new city after marriage. Her role as a timid, subservient wife frustrates her. Her pretence of becoming a dutiful and obedient wife helps her to dodge her husband's anger. To escape from her husband's verbal, sexual, emotional, physical, and intellectual abuse; she laboriously tries to change herself. She is slammed for her choice of clothes and is asked to skip kohl and lipstick as her husband associates them with harlots, screen-sirens, and seductresses. She adheres to her husband's wishes that give her an appearance of an unattractive woman, silenced and defeated. Everything that might compliment her personality is intentionally wiped out which makes her look undesirable.

The narrator is extra careful not to misplace any object in her cramped apartment as her husband doesn't tolerate such mistakes. She tries hard to impress her abusive spouse by obeying and letting herself be tamed. She fakes her interest and delight in her husband's political ideologies to save herself from being violated and thereby save her marriage. She is denied the freedom of choice and her body is violated. She is tortured severely for the sake of trivial accusations as her husband finds pleasure in physically and sexually assaulting her: "I am in pain. He drags me into the bedroom. I feel the heavy, funereal drumbeats of marriage as he forces my sari up around my waist." (163) Violence and forced copulation shatter her mental health and the will to live. She has to endure the extreme form of torture and forced sex which becomes a regular habit to tame and dominate her.

She clings on to her toxic and abusive relationship due to the fear that rushing to a conclusion might result in a life of regret. She doesn't disclose the severity of her situation to her parents as she was scared of the unhappiness and disgrace that might bring to them and how society might respond to her separation after a few months of marriage. She chooses to suffer in silence and does not disclose to them the risky side of her husband or her sufferings as she does not want to put her family in danger.

She is emotionally abused and manipulated by her spouse, as he uses the self-inflicted pain as a weapon to have her attention and limit her social media activities. The narrator feels robbed of her identity and had to hand over all her passwords to her husband to prove her loyalty. Despite Facebook being the only professional link that she had full access to, she deactivated her account due to her husband's constant pressure. A month into the marriage, he has answered her emails. Her confrontations about the same are dismissed with a taunt. He doesn't argue but defend his actions by claiming: "I want the world to know that we are a couple. I want them to accept us as a unit." (56) She struggles to write during the brief periods that she has, after all the household chores. She is subjected to abuse and violence as she wishes to become a prospective writer. There is a deliberate attempt to curb her creative flow of thoughts and thereby intellectually abuse her. She is accused of being materialistic and her act of writing poems becomes a source of trouble in her marriage. "We can move away from

our differences. If you put this within a poem, it will stay there, imprisoned forever.” (82) The husband restrains her from writing poems as he feels that it turns something temporary into permanent, where a passing emotion is exaggerated to create objective reality and it fuels hatred.

Her unwillingness to bear a child is termed as her narcissistic love for beauty and as a deliberate attempt to cut off her husband’s family line. She fears bearing the abuser’s child in her womb and letting the child live in a toxic and hostile environment: “This marriage, oppressive and impossible as it is, does not have the power to hold me hostage forever. But, if I were to be burdened with a child, I do not know how I could walk away.” (190) The narrator is advised by her mother that embracing motherhood isn’t a woman’s choice but her most important familial duty to bind her family together. She uses the natural kitchen ingredients to stop conception, a silent but deliberate revolt against her husband’s wish for a child.

Conclusion

The evident patriarchal power struggle that is deeply rooted in a society favours men over women in a marriage. Society expects women to follow the rules and restraints of marriage even if the relationship is unhealthy and this can lead to toxic interdependence, economic deprivation. This results in a societal trend that normalizes spousal violence and promotes the victims' tendency to suffer in silence. Intimate Partner Violence is one of the serious and most prevalent social evils which is under-recognised in the country. It includes verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual exploitation, mental torture, and marital rape. Women with alcoholic partners are more prone to domineering partnerships, life-threatening circumstances, and non-consensual sex. In the South Indian setting, be it rural or urban; the selected narratives exhibit heedless behaviour, indecisiveness, and intemperate aggression in men which aggravates the issues of marital distress and associated incidents of intimate partner violence against women.

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