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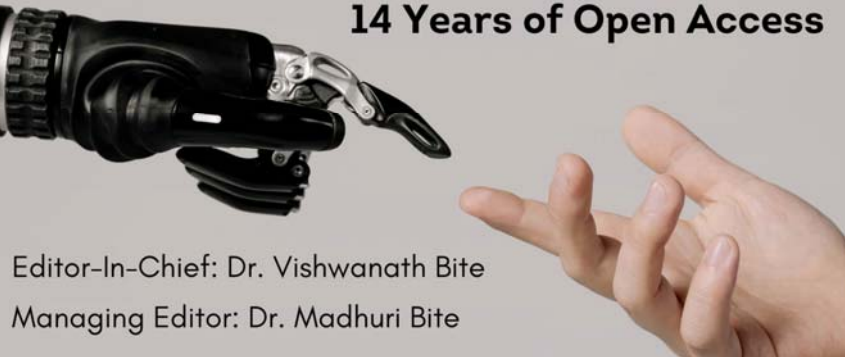
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Dalit Feminism and the Silence on Domestic Violence: A Comparative Study of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Other Contemporary Dalit Women Writers

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Abstract:

A crucial perspective for comprehending the confluence of caste and gender oppression in India is provided by Dalit feminist literature that addresses the systemic violence faced by Dalit women, with notable contributions from writers such as Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, and Gogu Shyamala. Their central emphasis has been on caste-based discrimination and the socio-economic difficulties that Dalit families face. Nonetheless, their writing frequently ignores the unique experiences of domestic abuse in marriages. Meena Kandasamy, on the other hand, offers a unique feminist examination of domestic violence in *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, emphasizing the psychological and intimate aspects of abuse within the framework of marriage. This article looks at how intimate partner violence—a topic that was mostly ignored in previous Dalit feminist works—is brought to the forefront of Kandasamy's novel, expanding the range of discourse within Dalit feminist thought. This paper calls for a more intersectional perspective in this area of feminist theory that confronts gender-based violence as well as caste, especially in the private realm of marriage, through a comparative examination of these writers. In doing so, it hopes to draw attention to the necessity

of formulating a more inclusive framework for Dalit feminist theory that incorporates the experiences of domestic abuse, ultimately providing a deeper insight into the multifaceted oppression encountered by Dalit women.

Keywords: Dalit feminism, Domestic Violence, Caste and Patriarchy, Intersectional Oppression, Marriage and Abuse.

The Dalit feminist perspective offers a crucial framework for examining the intersections of caste, gender, and violence in India. Dalit women face multiple layers of oppression, including being disenfranchised as women and as members of a lower caste. Their experiences of violence, particularly domestic violence, are often intensified by the intersection of caste and gender oppression. Dalit women writers like Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, and Gogu Shyamala have played a key role in bringing Dalit women's lived experiences into literary and social discussions. However, while these authors have explored various forms of caste and gender-based oppression, they have not consistently focused on domestic violence within the confines of marriage, a theme that Meena Kandasamy addresses in her work "*When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife.*"

The marginalized voices of Dalit women are now powerfully expressed via Dalit feminist writing. Throughout history, the male-dominated Dalit movements and the upper-caste patriarchy have both worked to silence Dalit women. Authors such as Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, and Gogu Shyamala have made it their mission to reveal the daily caste-based discrimination that Dalit women endure. They explain how caste and patriarchy converge, exposing Dalit women's double marginalization. "The Prisons We Broke" by Baby Kamble and "The Weave of My Life" by Urmila Pawar both demonstrate how ingrained caste oppression is in their lives. While these works touch on the daily violence and challenges faced by Dalit women, they do not go into the subtleties of marriage and domestic abuse. Their main area of interest is the wider range of caste violence that affects Dalit women's lives in both public and private settings.



Gender and Caste in Dalit Feminist Literature

Dalit feminist writers concentrate on how caste affects a Dalit woman's life in all its facets, from career and education to social standing and upward mobility. They look at the ways that untouchability, sexual exploitation, and denial of access to necessities like healthcare and education are used to uphold the caste system. The caste system is portrayed as a vicious institution that not only perpetuates physical and sexual violence but also economic and social isolation in works such as Gogu Shyamala's short stories and Bama's *Karukku*. Nevertheless, rather than focusing on the intricacies of marriage or domestic abuse, these works frequently highlight the Dalit communities' collective struggle against caste-based injustice.

Caste is prioritized as the main source of oppression, which is one of the reasons for the silence around domestic violence. The main topics of discussion in Dalit women's literature have been the wider socioeconomic context and the structural violence of caste. While there is little doubt that gender-based violence occurs in these works, it typically takes the form of upper-caste men sexually abusing women rather than the more private, interpersonal violence that occurs in marriages.

When I Hit You by Meena Kandasamy deviates from this pattern by putting a clear emphasis on domestic abuse within the context of marriage. The protagonist of the book is a profoundly intimate story that delves into her experience of being forced into an abusive marriage. Kandasamy reveals how, in situations where social norms require women to submit to men, marriage itself can be a patriarchal institution that justifies violence against women. In *When I Hit You*, Kandasamy shows how patriarchy functions inside the boundaries of the household, offering a feminist critique of the institution of marriage. The protagonist's spouse abuses her emotionally, psychologically, and physically while disguising his mistreatment as compassion, intelligence, or moral outrage. Kandasamy portrays how domestic violence is often overlooked, excused, or condoned by both the abuser and the society at large, making it difficult for women to break free.

In contrast to the writings of Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, or Gogu Shyamala, which frequently concentrate on more generalized structural violence, Kandasamy's book

emphasizes the intimate and personal. "When I Hit You" stands out in Dalit feminist discourse for its focus on the personal experience of domestic abuse within the institution of marriage.

Why Is Domestic Violence Not Addressed in Other Dalit Feminist Writings?

It might be argued that the authors Kamble, Pawar, Bama, and Shyamala's silence on domestic violence in marriages is a reflection of the discourse of Dalit feminism's larger goals. Because caste-based discrimination permeates all areas of Dalit women writers' lives, it has historically been the most serious issue for them. Within this framework, domestic violence could be viewed as but one aspect of a more extensive and intricate system of subjugation. Furthermore, group experiences rather than individual ones have frequently been the subject of Dalit writings by women authors. It could be argued that individual experiences of marital abuse might appear less significant compared to the broader struggle against caste discrimination within the hierarchy of oppression. This does not imply that domestic violence does not occur in Dalit communities; rather, it indicates that caste-based violence, which is perceived as more important and widespread, has frequently received more attention in the media. Moreover, the issue of representation emerges. In the broader feminist discussions in India, which have often been dominated by women from higher castes, Dalit women have historically been marginalized and inadequately represented. As a result, Dalit feminist literature has been obsessed with carving out a space for Dalit women's voices in the greater feminist movement. The emphasis on caste-based violence can be seen as a deliberate effort to highlight the distinctive experiences of Dalit women and differentiate them from those of upper-caste women.

While gender-based violence is a critical issue, caste significantly compounds the oppression faced by Dalit women. The intersection of caste and gender renders Dalit women especially susceptible to both public and private violence. Kandasamy's novel serves as a crucial intervention in Dalit feminist discourse by emphasizing the necessity of an intersectional approach to understanding and addressing domestic violence.

Kandasamy examines how sexism affects women in all social classes and transcends caste boundaries in her book *When I Hit You*. The protagonist, who isn't specifically labeled as Dalit, embodies the experiences of countless women who are forced into violent relationships. Being Dalit women writer Kandasamy highlights a type of violence that has frequently been



overlooked in discussions surrounding the Dalit feminist theory by concentrating on domestic abuse. The contributions of Baby Kamble, Gogu Shyamala, Bama, and Urmila Pawar have been crucial in elevating the status of Dalit women's voices. Their emphasis on caste-based discrimination has brought attention to the particular difficulties that Dalit women in India experience. Nonetheless, the lack of a thorough criticism of marital domestic abuse in their writings suggests a weakness in the Dalit feminist paradigm.

“*When I Hit You*” by Meena Kandasamy closes this gap by offering a thoughtful examination of domestic abuse within the context of marriage. Her book makes clear how crucial it is for Dalit feminist theory to more comprehensively address gender-based violence, especially when it comes to private violence. Dalit feminism can more effectively address the the diverse forms of violence experienced by Dalit women in both public and private spheres by adopting a comprehensive approach that considers both gender and caste. Finally, even though authors like Kamble, Pawar, Bama, and Shyamala have significantly influenced Dalit feminist writing, more books like Kandasamy's that delve into the intricacies of domestic abuse are required. A comprehensive framework for comprehending the oppression of Dalit women in all its forms can only be provided by Dalit feminism if it addresses both gender-based and caste-based violence.

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