

Autofiction as a Liminal Space: An Autotheoretical Reading of Meena Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You'

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Abstract

Autofiction is an innovative literary genre that invites engagement between life and art through lived experiences in literary texts to discuss authenticity. Autotheoretical reading of a text provides a plausibility to look into a textual discourse with an angle of authentic representation. It destabilizes the boundary between view and imagination, enabling a more fluid, self-reflexive mode of storytelling. It seeks to open avenues for the critical analysis of 'biographical autofiction'. Meena Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You' is a similar work that incorporates personal experiences into creative works to critique and subvert Genette's 'veiled autofiction' with an authenticity that creates a liminal space. It helps to provide a liminal narrative space to encounter and blur the boundaries among author, narrator, and protagonist within a heteronormative structure, as this text seeks to theorize tabooed ideas such as sexual autonomy and consent. This paper intends to highlight that writing could be an important tool against intimate partner violence (IPV) in the Indian context, where personal experience can be an instantiation of a theoretical point and act as a liminal space for reclaiming and renegotiating identity. This research offers a nuanced understanding of the Indian socio-literary context and underscores the importance of two formally related but not interchangeable ideas like autofiction and autobiographical representation in neoliberal modernity. It also opens up new possibilities for resistance and transformative discourse.

Keywords: Autofiction, Autotheory, Liminality, Marital Rape, Spousal Violence.

Introduction

Autofiction and its definition have been a topic of ongoing discussion since its inception. Self-exploration and self-presentation are seen as important parts of the genre's edge. Contemporary life writings have started to unsettle the demarcations of conventional boundaries. This instability has become a particular concern in feminist writings, where the emergence of autofiction and autotheory has challenged the assumption that lived experience and theoretical knowledge are two epistemological domains. Autofiction as defined is a type of fiction that "arrives at forms of knowledge about oneself that are not traditionally the province of autobiography" with "the urge to reveal oneself truly", a significant part of autofiction (1, 2). It refers to a "wide variety of literary forms of self-presentation between fact and fiction" and "a project of self-exploration and self-experimentation on the part of the author" (2) which explains why this style of writing is well-suited to writing about life after trauma (2). This strong focus on themes makes us

think of authenticity, which is essentially expounded as "discovering and expressing one's true essence" as an important idea to consider while examining autofiction (3).

A theoretically precise distinction among the literary terms like autobiography, memoir, autofiction and autotheory is necessary to understand the conceptual demarcation. These categories are historically and formally related but not interchangeable. An autobiography traditionally constructs a retrospective account of the author where the narrator or protagonist reflects the original author; on the other hand, a memoir deals with selected experiences or incidents that have retrospective significance. While autobiographical fiction is drawn from lived experiences, the author renders the subject as a fictionalized truth and a fictionalized representation of fact. Autofiction is primarily a narrative mode where the narrator deliberately destabilizes the factuality and fictionality allowing the author to transfer lived experiences to a narrative reconstruction. It

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occupies a productive space between autobiography and fiction. Autotheory is the process of theorizing any personal or lived experiences for theoretical inquiry. It is a critical mechanism by which experiences can acquire intellectual and political significance. Menna Kandasamy's literary text 'When I Hit You' closely resembles the characteristics in which personal and corporeal are integrated with the textual discussion. Concepts like agency, sexual autonomy, and consent are theorized by Kandasamy within the realm of the Indian context through "self-writing and self-theorizing" employing several allusions from feminist works (4). The amalgamation of Kandasamy's own experiences with those of feminist theorists serves as an internal critique of gender theories. The narrator situates herself within theoretical discourses rather than isolating herself from self-writing (4). To illustrate a theoretical point, she scrutinizes specific feminist theories alongside her own experiences in her work (5). Kandasamy utilizes the self-narration technique in her storytelling to divulge her abusive escapades.

Autofiction was first conceptualized with the unsettled demarcation of conventional boundaries between autobiography and fiction (6). Concept like 'autobiographical pact' foregrounds the relationship among author, narrator and protagonist while Doubrovsky's concept deliberates ambiguity. Recent past studies have further complicated the factuality and fictionality in self-narrative. Autofiction helps construct an authorial identity that is not a transparent reproduction of the empirical self but a self-reconstructed through memory and experience. This trajectory is followed by Kandasamy, in which traumatized experience, retrospective memory, and fictionalized coverage have helped not only to document the narrative but also to critically reconstruct it. Autotheory uses personal embodied experience as a material for technical inquiry. Past researchers have tried to reconstruct a theory in which autobiography and theory converge to spark a broader discussion. Texts like 'Feminist Theory' and 'Autotheories' have opined that autotheory can broaden the spectrum of discussion (7, 8). In this framework, this text of Kandasamy not only documents violence against women in the arena of the household, but it also takes the situation to discuss and analyze with patriarchy and feminism.

Her words, "I must write my own story" or the chapter epigraphs that take the names of eminent writers, signify the glocalization of their struggle (9). It is no longer a mini-narrative of violence but has become a meta-narrative of intellectual discussion.

The present study has examined how autofiction creates a liminal space for the person affected by domestic abuse which can be reinterpreted and theorized through an autotheoretical mode of representation of this select text. Rather than treating the text as a document of violence, a fictionalized account of narration like other texts but a formal blending of autobiography and fiction. It functions as an epistemological threshold that destabilizes the boundary of lived experience into critical knowledge. Liminal space serves as a central conceptual framework that helps the textual analysis to shift the boundaries between fact and fiction and between private suffering and political critique. Abjection serves as a supporting category for analyzing the reconstruction of the feminine self and for vocalizing the voiceless. This study analyzes how, by breaking the conventional path, 'When I Hit You' constructs autofiction providing a formal space to conceptualize how the condition transforms personal suffering into a feminist critique of resistance.

Methodology

This study aims to reconnoiter Meena Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You', which is fundamentally grounded in the concepts of autofiction and auto theoretical self-representation, in which the protagonist seeks to establish her identity through continuous negotiation within a patriarchal structure. It employs a qualitative research design, using close reading of the novel to examine the relationship between fictional narration and factual negotiation in feminist knowledge production. This research is situated within a textual and interpretative framework with character-centric analysis.

The specific objectives of this investigation focus on how the autotheoretical concept establishes a close relationship between practical experience and fictional representation, thereby rendering the experience embodied within the field of critical feminist knowledge. These theoretical strategies act as a liminal space that helps the survivor (the unnamed narrator of this story) to resist all kinds

of atrocities (her husband and his misogynist ideology) created by patriarchal power. It becomes a site of identity creation of the victim (the narrator becoming a successful author) who has experienced marital violence.

This research has also employed purposive text selection, focusing exclusively on how the chosen text is particularly suitable for the present study, in which an anonymous narrator creates ambiguity in the narration. It enables us to examine the text as a form of biographical autofiction rather than as a conventional literary genre such as memory writing or autobiography.

This textual analysis has four interconnected sections. First, this research deals with autofictional connotation where it talks about autobiographical reference, fictionality, and authorial identity. But at the same time, it creates attention with the distinction between the empirical author and the textual narrator. Secondly, it discusses autotheoretical self-reflexivity, in which the protagonist reflects on how their personal experience of violence and atrocities becomes a form of inquiry. Third, this research shows how the body can act in two ways: a patriarchal control where it suffers with fear, humiliation, and isolation, and at the same time, the same body becomes a site of self-reclamation to find a liminal space of possibilities amid the hardship of Indian women. Fourth, it shows how the duality of silence and speech, confinement and freedom, dependence and selfhood create a liminal space for them to form identity.

This research has also given attention to fragmentation, temporal shift which helps reader to understand how the novel blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction, victimhood and agency, to move from an object of discourse in a male-dominated society to a producer of knowledge for others. This investigative trajectory allows the text not to become a documented narrative of suffering but to become a source of critical knowledge of upliftment.

Results

The concept of authenticity is especially beneficial for analyzing autofictions. Primarily, it deals with the pair of self-understanding (finding out who you really are) and self-presentation (articulating who you really are) and it also helps these two to work together in a positive way. Self-discovery has

always been closely associated with constant self-revelation across different situations and how they share their awareness of themselves with the reader. Secondly, the idea combines thoughts on what a 'true' self is with ways to seek and display that kind of authenticity. This fits well with autofiction's examination of various narrative tactics that aim to foster new forms of self-awareness in the modern world. Personal narration is crucial in the first-person narrative of fiction, enabling writers to express their personal escapades veridically while embracing creative latitude (10). The self-theorizing technique plays an important role in underscoring the profound relationship between the self and the world while accentuating the role of historical and ideological circumstances as crucial determinants of individual self-experience (11). The domain of autobiography studies has expanded to include life writings from other languages, cultures, and historical contexts, necessitating heightened vigilance in the analysis of autobiographical texts to mitigate cultural biases (12). Self-theorization is essential to deter researchers from analyzing texts through a distorted cultural lens. The gradual rise of interest in women's memoirs, as emphasized by articulating personal experiences and influencing feminist theory, culminated in formal academic acknowledgment circa. Scholarly works like 'The Female Eunuch' and 'The Dialectic of Sex' combined autobiographical and analytical elements to highlight the interlinking connections between the personal and political domains (13, 14). In the meantime, contemporary literature such as 'Sexual Politics', Flying, and Sita contributed to this point of view by arguing that individual proficiency is the most important part of theory (15-18). The theoretical construct 'autotheory' has emerged to describe the process of engaging with and blending life, art, and theory through the lens of one's lived experiences. The term autotheory was included in the text 'The Argonauts' which quickly became famous in studies of autobiography in the blurb section of the book (4, 19). Nelson likes autotheory because it lets her try new things and makes her work different from memoirs (20).

Carmody asserts that autotheory functions as a 'liberatory practice', a liminal space for the marginalized and oppressed self. She describes autotheoretical role as drawing phenomeno-

logically from the actual experience of existence while transmuting that conveyed experience into alternative forms, such as art, literature, novel relationships, or caregiving communities. This represents a mode of theorizing with ramifications extending beyond the text or institution (5). The famous feminist concept of "the personal is political", which is taken up by autotheory to place the discussion in global literature (21). Fournier characterizes it as the incorporation of the self, or 'auto', into philosophical concepts or theory, frequently through direct, performative, or self-conscious methods, thereby positioning it within an interdisciplinary genre (20). 'When I Hit You' talks about how Indian feminists don't use autotheory enough in their writing and criticism. The story is set in modernized India and follows an unnamed main character who ties her knot with a university professor. The unnamed wife wants to express herself through a novel to show how much pain she is in. This "artistic agency" lets her avoid the predicted flood of negative remarks that would come her way if she just talked about it (22, 23). The main character is a manifestation of Kandasamy's personal agony. She tries to show the horrible things that happen to women who are physically and sexually abused through her writing. It gives her strength, helps her to leave their marriage, and makes her speak up for many other women who have been hurt. It provides her with a channel to vent her problems and a means to express herself. The fictioneer bases the story on her failed marriage, which ended suddenly in 2012, but she treats it as fiction (24). She alienates herself from artists and writers who use autofictional methods and want to separate their work from the conventional norms of memoir or autobiography (23). Instead of pigeonholing her work in the above-mentioned categories, she wants to take a different path. In an interview, she says she doesn't want to be known only as an abjected, maltreated woman but as a prolific woman writer. People shouldn't think of her book as a survivor's story; instead, they should see it as a comprehensive critique of the country's political and social discourse. The young wife in the story, who agrees with Kandasamy's point of view, does not want to be seen as just an "abused woman" or a "victim subject" (25). Her identification includes more than just being a surviving rape victim but proclaims to be a "woman writer" (23).

Kandasamy's literary text is a unique confluence of the portrayal of domestic violence and politics as "intermingling of [the] political and domestic" (9). Kandasamy disapprovingly talked about whether 'When I Hit You' should be called an autobiography or a memoir. For her, why is a woman's work seen in this way? This is also a problem with the way society is set up, namely, the amount of access we have to public space. How much room do we have to think? How much are women talking about what's going on in politics? There would be an equal number of fictions about politics by the female and male authors only if the playing fields were fair and equal. But the reality is that a book written by a male author garners significant interest nationwide and in current events. But for a woman writer's book is just about a woman's life (26).

Even though Kandasamy calls her text autofiction, 'When I Hit You' has the peculiarity of more like an autotheory because it uses both first-person narrative and established theoretical frameworks from modern scholarship (27). To examine her personal story through different feminist ideologies, Kandasamy comprises quotes from prominent figures like literature from across the world such as Colombia, Poland, USA and India. She has quoted prominent figures like Pilar Quintana, Wislawa Szymborska, Kamala Das, Margaret Atwood, and others at the start of each chapter. These authors are examples of women who write about women's experiences to construct their own narrative universes. These quotes have two purposes. At first, they agreed that violence against women is a global problem that goes beyond borders. Secondly, they stress how writing helps women show and fight these wrongs by making them public. This paper argues that Kandasamy's literature draws on feminist theories, especially those originating in the Euro-American perspective, to elucidate toxic relationships and examine the patriarchal notion within an Indian framework. This study employs feminist theories to explain the typical reasons why men abuse women at home. Kandasamy shows that this is a problem affecting women worldwide. Indian feminists tend to embrace Western feminist ideas to legitimize their movements (28). The most important thing about her work is how well she uses the narrative style of autotheory in her autofictional work. By using this strategy, she

shows she is an accredited writer who speaks to her anxieties and adds her individual upheaval to the debate. She uses this method to challenge the usual portrayal of women as victims in literature and theory (25).

This paper transcends the idea by putting the autofictional book in the category of autotheory; it looks at how this way of telling stories effectively deals with the normalizing and hiding of domestic abuse and marital rape in India. It does this by bringing to light the veiled facets of a married woman's life, deconstructing her life story and setting it in the public and political spheres. The article says that a literary approach helps to shed light on and explain a political discourse about domestic violence, especially intimate partner violence (IPV), which has long been seen as a personal issue rather than a crime against society. This article demonstrates the application of autotheory to the analysis of autofictional texts through discourse and textual analysis, offering a critical framework for examining autotheoretical elements within a text. To this point, however, little research has examined how autofiction and authenticity relate to one another. Additionally, numerous individuals who briefly conceptualized it in their discussion. It is perceived that authenticity is an outworn ideal propagated by conventional autobiography. It aims to challenge and surpass these conventional notions with this analysis.

Discussion

Consent or Consensual

Fournier characterizes autotheoretical concepts as integrating various theoretical paradigms, such as poststructuralism, affective shift, queer turn, and performative turn, thereby prompting an inquiry into their status as a theoretical turn (23). Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You' revisits the issue of consensual marital sex to examine women's human and constitutional privileges. The incorporation of a human rights perspective in combating VAW is an important aspect of the fundamental rights of women, wherein the 'legality' of violence has supplanted social and cultural norms as the primary criterion for evaluating crime and justice. Vocabulary used in this text is grounded in civil liberties discourse. Politically charged and emotionally intense words like "my life had become a country under surveillance," which

proffers her husband "a license to own her" (9), indicate the denial of civil liberties. The author's use of vocabulary like 'silence', 'control', and 'ownership' indicates a systematic curtailing of the protagonist's personal liberty by her abusive husband. Constitutional commitment of 'justice', 'liberty', and 'equality' for all are not safeguarding married women. Still, they don't have these rights because their marriages often hinge on controlling and owning their sexuality and identity. Innominate magsman of this novel illustrates her afflictions as infringements on constitutional rights. This constitution proffers its citizens the right to equality under Article 14, freedom of expression under Article 19.1.a, the right to pursue any profession under Article 19.1.g, liberty to adhere to any ideology or faith under Article 25, and, most significantly, the right to privacy, autonomy, and bodily integrity of a woman under Article 21 (29). Incremental restrictions on these constitutional rights reflect the timeline of hostilities as the marital relationship evolves. The torture, abuse, and sexual assault endured by the woman within marriage, which surpasses the scope of efficacious legal protection, are characterized as an "insult to the constitutional objectives of individual autonomy, dignity, and gender equality" (30).

The author has analytically examined the intimate partner's attitude in the story, showing that in India, the wife is expected to be submissive in marriage. The narrator shows how the husband uses his distrust to invade his wife's privacy and assert control. He wants her email account password so he can spy on her chats. In the end, he cuts off all her connections to the outside world and deletes all her messages. The protagonist calls it "a cultural revolution (purge) for a computer age" (9). The story shows that she cares about privacy more than just her own speech. This is a bigger issue in India. The Supreme Court vocalized that privacy is an important part of a person's right to life and dignity. It requires safeguarding the "inner recesses of human personality" from "unwanted intrusion" (31). This story shows that when a husband invades a wife's privacy, he also deprives her of the freedom to live with dignity.

'Micro-violence,' as coined by Kandasamy to define mistrust, physical assault, billingsgate, and coercion, is prevalent in Indian society. The central character in the book 'When I Hit You' shows

readers how people often think of rape as 'normal' and 'harmless' when it happens between a husband and wife. She stresses that Indian cultural discussions on marriage show that sex between a man and a woman in marriage is a sacred act in India. The discourse on holiness makes a clear distinction between married sex and rape, which makes it hard for people to recognize marital rape in today's social and legal frameworks of marriage. Her idealized notion of 'marriage' is rapidly altered following her association with a university professor (32). This raises a serious question about the relevance of marriage in India. The narrator uses sarcasm to criticize the idea that marriage is sacred. She says, "The fire that made our union sacred and eternal now blazes in the parting of my thighs" (9). She disagrees with the social and cultural ideas that the legislation is established with exceptions, which says that marital rape is not rape. Section 63 (i) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) explicates any kind of "physical intimacy against her will" and "without her consent" as rape (33). Like many other exceptions, this section has a grandfather clause that says "Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, as long as the wife is not under eighteen years of age, does not constitute rape" (33). This Exception makes the wife's consent and readiness to have sex with her intimate partner (husband) pointless and unnecessary. Feminist activists and academicians claim that considering wedlock as a lifelong agreement to have sex goes against the Indian Constitution, which acts to safeguard everyone's right to life, freedom, equality, and dignity. As a result, the definition of rape should no longer leave out marital rape, and the law should identify and include marital rape in the definition of rape. In her search for legal action against marital rape, the narrator is given divorce as the only option. The divorce petition says that the marriage failed because of her "ultra-feminism" and the way her parents raised her in a "modern" way (9). This answer from the judicial system shows that while divorce and other legal tools help a modern democratic state, they are nonetheless shaped by the country's strict conservative culture. Kandasamy's depiction of legal inadequacies in safeguarding women's rights inside the domestic sphere largely aligns with MacKinnon's analysis. Her analysis of gender legislation through a feminist lens and promotes the use of human rights

discourse to address marital violence. This discussion argues that the law is among the social institutions that have perpetuated disparities in the civil liberties of men and women (34). It is asserted that in India, the legal framework forced women into a second-class citizen of stereotyped status by prioritizing familial and marital obligations over women's individual rights (35). The author through her text, uses her own abusive marriage to talk about how Indian laws around domestic violence have changed in recent years. The Indian Parliament has made a significant step by passing the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005. The first legislation to call marital violence 'cruelty' and allow divorce as a way to get out of it is the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 (36). In 1983, Section 498A (IPC), now 85 (BNS), made domestic violence a crime, with a focus on abuse related to dowries (36).

'Dowry death', a new section was included in the existing act of the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) in the year 1986, and cruelty in 2005 to resist against many types of abuse, which covers a span of physical, mental, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse (37). This literary text addresses the issues of sexual abuse and marital rape, which have not been given enough attention in laws against domestic violence. Spousal abuse has been a problem in India for a long time. Cultural and social factors make it hard to take legal action against any type of violence (IPV) in society, labeled as a 'private affair' between partners. These views have created a reluctance to acknowledge and address the problem of domestic servitude within the legal system. The literary composition quietly criticizes the lack of awareness of important issues like domestic abuse which doesn't address marital rape. For at least 30 years, the interdiction of marital rape has been a burning issue in India. Many people who support it say that it is domestic abuse and should be treated as a crime. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act was passed in 2013 and made marital rape a crime under certain conditions (38). This law doesn't cover everything. Consent has become an important section while dealing with marital rape in the country. It can be hard to determine the distinction between consensual sex between married people and marital rape because cultural and social standards consistently prioritize the husband's sexual demands first.

Neo-feminist Approach

Autotheory was postulated and imbued with theoretical ideologies, opining, “it is not merely that the personal must become political, but that the personal must initially become theoretical” (39). The narrator aims to transcend the conventional view of female sexuality as private and personal, bringing it into the public and political sphere. She wants to emphasize the situations that arise from the universalized, which is an outcome of the ‘rights’ discourse of feminism in India. She wants to transmute conventional notions of the First World’s perspective towards the Third World women (25). It reminds us that bell hooks idea of feminism is not a monolithic identity but a diverse area with multiple perspectives. To adopt self-representation, she chose autotheory to validate her perspective. Sacramental theory provides a shield for males in patriarchal society from marital abuse. She has challenged the right theories that have fallen short in adequately addressing the deep-rooted spousal violence by embracing ‘personal is political’.

‘Sexual autonomy’ is an important connotation in the institution of marriage in accordance with the school of liberal feminism like Carolo Pateman. She has criticized it because it is not even a proper contract between a man and a woman, in which the woman is excluded from any discussion (40). The sacramental model of marriage has fallen short in safeguarding women from the Indian patriarchal condition. Uniyal’s annotation on the Hindu Marriage Act states that it’s an evolved form of it. It’s perceived as a sacred union between two heterosexual individuals, but now it’s moved to the state of contract due to several women’s rights legislations (41). Property rights and inheritance played a momentous role in reshaping marriage into a contract and in creating a confluence of sacrament and contract, a complex interaction of sacred and legal considerations (42). Multiple rape attempts by her husband, as argued by Kandasamy, are a means of taking control over her body by her husband. It leads her to become more assertive for her rights. His dislike of her profession as a writer leads him to desire patriarchal control over her. He condemns her feminist thoughts. He spoke “the problem is your feminism, the feminism that makes you an individual” (9). He is also unhappy with his wife’s notion of a free mind and speech. He does not like to be in an open forum of discussion

regarding sexuality by her wife. It should be a private affair and writing about sexuality is a kind of ‘elite prostitution’. This freedom of speech is not an actual ‘freedom’ but a ‘sexual anarchy’. This anarchy can only be controlled through the notions of stringent patriarchy set over female sexuality (43). This picture visualizes the interplay between men’s desire for control over a broader societal issue and the feminine urge for independence.

The author has implemented the concept of self-theorizing in her texts ‘When I Hit You’ which incorporates elements of autobiography to bring lived experiences into the discussion. Genette’s concept of veiled autobiography is closely relevant to the novel because the narrator is unnamed throughout the narrative, and the text is presented as fiction to create a distance from reality. But her identity as a writer, her literary aspiration, and her marriage with a politically engaged man, her experience of coercive control, closely resemble Kandasamy’s publicly documented life. The creation of formal distance with the publicly documented life of the writer is associated with veiled autobiography. This deliberate tension between concealment and recognizability shows how the text modifies Genette’s concept of veiled autobiography to transform lived trauma into narrativized experience by reconfiguring veiled as a strategy. This novel draws significant substance from the writer Kandasamy’s personal experience but she has deliberately used fictional and literary techniques to keep her personal self from any direct connection with the narration. The narrator’s identity as a young Tamil writer and her writing on caste and feudalism closely associate her with Kandasamy and her trajectory as a writer. Marital abuse and intimate partner violence have been publicly acknowledged by Kandasamy. Yet she denied directly linking it to the self, but led it from lived experience into a crafted story. Thus, it is unlike an autobiography, which must have a close pact between writer and narrator, but it sustained biographical correspondence with fictionalized ideas, making it a precise designation of biographical autofiction.

Her personal encounters in real life enable her readers to deal with the concept of marital rape, which is still an ambiguous topic for discussion in the Indian socio-cultural atmosphere. She provides a detailed, critical examination of her personal experiences to help readers to understand. Her

partner's abusive language, violent behavior, and sexist comments are the result of rape and assault. She ascertains that "sex actually rape becomes his weapon to tame me", which will ultimately ruin her from the inside with her identity (9). His intention of rape is not only to control her but also to punish her in a way so that she will not be able to offer herself to any man and will become a begging bowl. Rape is always considered a "defeat" for any woman and vice versa, a man takes it as a means of frustration and revenge (9). The author has argued that rape is a fight for a woman that she cannot win. Her husband's continuous mistrust of her secretive affair with a person leads her body towards "pollutant" (9). It is actually making her "cast off" from the mainstream of society, and she will become an abject body with no identity or importance and will violate her sacred rituals of marriage (44). The husband's narration of his mind is very lucid, as he can punish a body that is forever polluted and no longer loyal to him and this is the philosophy of her rape. Kandasamy used the lens of individualism to deconstruct the violence of rape, which is not about family honor, failed marriage, or even sexual gratification, but more and more about control over the body and a means of assault on an individual's rights and well-being. Kandasamy's text does not express the urge for equality or general notions of feminism but the freedom of body control. The protagonist wants to express her control over sexuality within a marriage. Consent, a predominant key element of marriage, is highlighted by the anonymous narrator. Economic independence can address the imbalances of rights. In that regard, marriage can be redefined with the new model of 'contract' which will give an equal interest in marriage for both partners. Marriage as a "contract is seen as a universal category that can include women" (40). She further added that the contract is not just a written document but a regulated patriarchal moral code. A better contract offers a clear provision for divorce and mutual use of bodies to maintain individual ownership. Kandasamy tried to ensure the political and legal rights of women, especially married women. Indian legal forums have made a number of reforms in the name of widow marriage, inheritance rights to uplift social and economic autonomy, but 'sexual autonomy' has always become an idea of taboo, and there is no available provision to restore it. She argues for a separate

contract clause to be included in the terms of marriage "sexual contract" (40). Its absence is the biggest lacuna of the subcontinental marriage system and the classical idea of public marital policy should be replaced with private marital law.

Autofiction as a Liminal Space

In the text 'autofiction' works as a tool to create a powerful liminal space that can place narrative forms and lived experiences. Autofiction, as a new genre, suggests an in-betweenness or liminality in which autobiographical elements merge with fictional narratives. It's an in-between zone, a threshold state that blurs the boundaries between truth and imagination. Homi K Bhava proposed 'Third Space' which suggests fluxity instead of fixity. The narrator is also a person who closely resembles the author, an existing liminality of real and fiction to challenge the state of identity and rights in persistent domestic violence. The author merged real and fictional elements in the narrator's identity to show the state of trauma and possibility in the realm of marital abuse, where writing through auto-fictional identity can act as a form of resistance. Kandasamy has used the concept of autofiction not only to destabilize persistent generic boundaries but also to prove that liminal space can be a useful tool for identity. It has the power to challenge patriarchal gender norms and dominant narratives to reclaim voice.

Kandasamy constructed her work as a 'counter discourse' to engage with spousal violence which is a fundamental semblance of her autofictional work. Kandasamy has used techniques such as fragmentation, temporal shift, metafictional intervention, and self-reflexive narrative to visualize the problems faced by married women in the Indian ménage. With the fragmentation technique, she has not only recorded a continuous chronological account of the marriage, traumatic memory but also reconstructed it. With the temporal shift, she is gliding from past experience to present conscious state. It creates a binary opposition of 'experiencing I' and 'narrating I' to reconstruct the narrative debate. Her traumatic experience of personal life becomes a site of literature for discussion, which is helped by metafictional intervention and her quest for identity as a writer amid the ongoing brutality of her husband shows self-reflexive narration which helps her experience into a consciously constructed narrative.

MacKinnon's approach of 'dominance' has been reflected through her narrative of criticizing the fundamental relationships between spouse, the institution of marriage, patriarchal dominance and foregrounding inequality. MacKinnon structured marital abuse on a political narrative of male supremacy. Kandasamy took it to apply to Indian soil, where marriage is an unchallenged entity, even in a heinous crime like marital rape (45). The law is abided by the constitution under Article 14, which promises to safeguard everyone from all forms of inequality, but plays a game of double standards in India. Rape is considered a heinous crime across all borders, but it has exceptions in India. BNS 63 defines rape but exempts the husband from it (32). In India, the sacramental union cannot be challenged by law. The traditional belief of sacred status must be exempted, and criminalization of it is unnecessary and will be an attempt on the conscience of India. Policymakers of any country have the responsibility to make policy on any sub judice matter. But during a Lok Shobha (upper house of the Indian Parliament) debate, the speaker opined that spousal or marital disputes should be resolved within the confines of the family and not politicized or publicized. India has a unique family system, and not everything is open to discussion. Counter discourse is one of the key elements of any autotheoretical discussion. The novel offers a counter-narrative inquiry of egregious discrimination of all sorts. Kandasamy narrated her story to condemn the Indian family system where husbands are considered to be protectors and guardians of their consort's sexuality. She has developed a language to discuss marital rape within a system. In the novel, the female protagonist, who is an identical replica of the author herself, experienced rape from her husband and has been impacted on her soul and mind. She argues an important opinion about rape and marital rape. A rape by a husband has much more impact on the mental condition of a woman than a rape by a stranger. "Savage rite" is the only metaphor she used to depict her condition with her discernment of "how it feels to be raped within a marriage" (9). It associates us with 'dominance feminism' where women are not only deprived of economic, civil, or legal rights but it goes beyond to sexuality. In the Indian context, a wife is assumed to withdraw not only her identity but her consent from everywhere and become an abjected object

for her husband. It is an unconditional surrender with no chance of revoking. India doesn't have any proper idea of consent because marital sex and marital rape are always considered to be inconsequential. Her words "I was raped within a marriage, on a bed where my 'no' held no meaning" signify an abjected woman with an identity of object (9). A woman does not even have the right to say 'no'; she can just offer voluntary sex to be saved from getting raped. Non-consensual sex by any stranger will become a conjugal right for the husband without any penalty. Kandasamy condemns it more than any other form of rape because the wife has to live with the rapist under the same roof to be raped again and again without any support from family, as well as the legal system. In the novel, the protagonist has to live with a person who is not the silhouette of a car parking or masked molester, but the person who spiked her drink and who wakes up every morning with her. Living with an abusive husband with impunity and calling it a 'sacred' relationship is an irony for women in India.

Marriage in any religion is considered a sacred institution. There is no provision for abuse or disharmony where a wife needs any guardianship from a husband. The novel raised the same concern as the author's personal experiences. Home is always considered a 'safe place' to be available for everyone in their time of trouble, but the protagonist gets a reply of "suspicion is the nature of a man" and it is because of "out of love" (9). Kandasamy theorized her idea, which is closely connected to radical feminism. The unnamed narrator or wife is cast off with all sorts of identity and realizes her status as part of a political circus in a marriage with a duty of household care and entertaining her husband. The marriage is not out of love but a ticket of ambition to join a new tribe of inequality. The narrator has compared marriage to a chessboard game in which the wife is the 'king', surrounded and able to move only one step, while the husband, as the 'queen', can go in any direction of choice and will. Reproductive autonomy under Article 21 gives women the right to have a child of their own choosing, but in reality, the decision is made by the husband and the doctor. The importance of liminal space is reflected in the prevailing condition of women in India where rape is an act of controlling a situation. Society

admonishes a victim, insisting that a husband is not an enemy and that silence is golden.

Conclusion

Personal experiences are examined to analyze the social, economic, and political discourse of freedom in India. 'When I Hit You', based on the author's own experiences, is a critique of IPV (intimate partner violence). Kandasamy used her personal experience to theorize a global phenomenon. Autotheory or an autotheoretical approach for an autofictional text is not just an idea to tell a story but to have a space (liminal) for self-preservation. She ties her personal ordeal into the larger framework of feminism. She believes in speaking to more people to connect your idea with that. The truth is, if you reduce the people, you get reduced in the mirror of life.

Authenticity is not an inherent consequence of autoethnographic writing, but it arises from the interplay of practical experience, authorial position, and reader reception. Kandasamy's narrator always tried to transform her personal experience into a critical experience. The question like "what kind of feminist was she?" or is it a public stunt? are visualizing the authentic representation of women in society. The publicly known authorial identity helps the reader to identify how the personal experience becomes a site of critical knowledge which creates an authentic representation of a survivor.

The Abhaya or Nirbhaya case has connected the masses but marital rape has been confined to the confines of four walls. The lack of discussion to find a liminal space for the victims of marital rape is probably due to the absence of theoretical frameworks that are widely accepted. Unfortunately, the law of this country has prevented private affairs from being challenged. 'When I Hit You' with the anonymous victim has open the private domain to the readers to criticize. An autotheoretical approach can be a means of uncovering the intricacies of the spousal relationship and a means of liminality to be abjected from victimhood. This study is limited and constructed with the primary text 'When I Hit You' without incorporating any empirical or reader-response perspective. Further studies could examine contemporary texts that deal with autofiction and autotheory in relation to trauma and feminist knowledge production. It will enrich

the literature and can help analyze contemporary women's problems.

Abbreviations

BNS: Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, IPV: Intimate Partner Violence.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. All materials discussed and cited are publicly available through published books, journal articles, and other scholarly sources referenced in the manuscript.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of generative artificial intelligence. All conceptualization, analysis, interpretation, and writing were undertaken independently by the authors.

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