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Domestic Violence: A Feministic Force from the Viewpoint of Meena Kandasamy

Pinaki Bakshi

Assistant Professor,
Bhaskar Degree College,
Udhampur

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Abstract:

“Women rights are human rights and human rights are women rights.”

The above bunch of words smell liberated in each and every sense. If one treat women rights as human rights and vice versa, then the epoch has come to shun the conventional and deep rooted idea of women’s domestic violence as a gender parity, and on the grounds, just because she is a woman, a handover device to someone, to use according to his comfort and live under the umbrella provided by stereotypes. This paper will throw light on treatment of women parity on universal front. Before women, they are soul creatures, and one of the best creation of nature, who have exactly equal right to give back to phallocentrism, if it halt the moment of their liberation. This I will be reflecting by throwing light on one of the boldest feminist writer Meena Kandasamy, who with par excellence has shown her own story in one of her striking novel: *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the writer as a Young Wife*. And this problem is just not with one case only, in fact it has universal essence.

The reasons one could muster for the vain pelf of patriarchy can be neurotic dependency of battered wives or financially dependency, which sometimes force women to remain under stereotypical shed. The fact that they are so often financially dependent upon the men who beats them makes for a vicious kind of entrapment. It is emotional dependency, though that puts a double lock on the trap. There is a kind of panic that women have about being able to make it in anyway other than being dependent on their husbands. They have been taught their whole lives that they cannot. It is a conditioning process. It is just like, in such situations in which they have no effect on their environments, animals began to give up. The same thing happens to a victim. Stay long enough in a situation in which you feel you have no control, and you will simply stop responding. This is what learned helplessness is. Perpetrators of abuse often make their victims to believe that they are somehow responsible for their own abuse. Such misplaced notions shift the blame of the abuse from the abuser to the abuse.

The foremost attempt of this paper is to make women realize of their existential worth, which is no birth right of anyone to harm and also to make them understand that, **“if she will take her stand, nobody could dare to offer her helping hand.”**

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Stereotypes, Phallocentrism, Narrow mindedness, Humanity, Women’s Rights, Patriarchy

A Review of Literature

A research thesis on “*Domestic Violence against Women: A Literature Review*” by Amanda J. Grovert in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree. This research paper usually deals with domestic violence against women usually focuses on the cycle of violence within abusive relationships, why women so frequently stay in abusive relationships and what is the most helpful in allowing them to leave. According to data every year in USA, between 1.5 and 3.6 million women are raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner. With multiple assaults per individual, this adds up to approximately 4 to 6 million intimate partner physical and sexual assaults every year.

Another research paper on *Domestic Violence: ‘The Dark Truth of Our Society’* by Pankaj Chhikara, Jitender Jakhar, Anil Malik, Kamal Singla Singla and Sk Dhatarwal. The following research paper is dealing with the nature, behaviour and types of domestic violence. The various reasons, symptoms and consequences have been discussed. And concluding part has been done by providing Law Enforcement measures and how to avoid the violence.

Another paper “*Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women*” by WHO, Geneva, Switzerland. The paper has mostly thrown light on guidelines focussing on the specific ethical and safety issues. These recommendations emerged from discussion of those prepared for the WHO Multi- country study on Women’s Health and ethical and safety considerations associated with conducting population-Based surveys on domestic violence against women.

One more research topic on “*Violence in the family*”: *A Review of Research in the Seventies*” by Richard J. Gelles mostly focussing upon research on family violence in the seventies. The issue of family violence became increasingly visible as a social and family issue in the decade of the seventies. Research in 60’s has been compared to 70’s, in which in former times domestic violence was not much in vogue, but in 70’s started to had hold. The focus has been done majority on domestic violence within the family, which includes, Parent to Child Violence, Husband to Wife Violence and Violence with Oldies.

So, the motive of throwing light on few former research work on domestic violence is to make sure about my topic that I have chosen from very different perspective, in which I will be broadening horizon by rather than focussing on already stretched topics in previous research papers that what is domestic violence, types of violence, intensity, guidelines, safety measures, violence within family and many more and focussing on my chosen topic that ‘Before Woman Iam a human’, in which the treatment of woman parity on universal front has been discussed. This is a topic, in which there is no previous research I could found and this in fact pointing upon already glided topics, which have faced research, will stand at par by strengthening the feminity
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and making them aware and proud of their privileged existence, that they could fit as a set example of womanity as well as humanity as a whole.

Writer's Introduction

The thought of being dwelling at some literary reputed place makes everyone to believe that, the society is all free from shackles and subjugated thinking. The independent status of women only reflects the positive life of the character, the educated woman, we generally refer to as the most powerful and emerging force in the society, but, sometimes and in some cases it just act as mere illusion, as in the case of Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy, wrapped with all honour, dignity and independency before marriage and what divergent her life took after marriage is too easy to convince us that, not in all the cases the scenario is same.

Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy born in 1984, is an Indian poet, fiction writer and translator and activist, based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Most of her works are puffed with feminism and the anti-caste annihilation movement of the contemporary Indian epoch, which is the obvious reaction of her being attacked and tormented by the stereo realm. Meena is widely known for her unapologetic approach towards fighting patriarchy and the caste system. Being born into a marginalized nomadic tribe, she views caste oppression through a feminist lens and presents them in the form of anthologies, novels, columns of different magazines and her social media.

As a writer, Meena's focus was mainly on caste annihilation, feminism and linguistic identity. A fierce critique of academic language, she says, "Poetry is not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain set of practices while you present your ideas in the way that academic language is." She gives literary form a new sense of personality, attaching value to the image of man. She raises her confessional traits to the level of a specific universal appeal.

Her two revolutionary poems to win accolades in all – India poetry competitions are:- *Touch*(2006) and *Ms. Militancy*(2010). Her first poetry collections, 'Touch' were published in August 2006, with a foreword by Kamala Das. It was translated into five different languages upon publication. The poem amplifies, illustrates and carries on this struggle for power and autonomy by women poets, Apart from her expert use of language, she has a sincerity of feeling and an honesty of experience rarely use of language, she has a sincerity of feeling and an honesty of experience rarely encountered.

Her poetry is at best of private sensibility. Her consciousness is firmly yoked to the world around her, a world characterised by ecstasy and pain, love and despair. Her quest for identity is not the spiritual odyssey; it is a human journey, a sociological journey that dignifies the reader:

"Caste, yet again authored a tragedy
He, disease wrecked, downtrodden."

There is always a haunting note of despondency marked in Meena's poetic lines. We may refer to her poem, "Immanuel":

“Now, if there be any mourning
Let it be for our heroes
Yet to die, fighting...”

In an interview with Sampsonia Way Magazine, she says “My poetry is naked, my poetry is in tears, my poetry screams in anger, my poetry writes in pain. My poetry smells of blood, my poetry salutes sacrifice. My poetry speaks like my people; my poetry speaks for my people.” From these bunch of words, her mindset as a writer can be understood very well.

Her few works to understand her feministic mindset:-

- 1) ‘*A Cunning Stunt*’- In her very first poem, she speaks of the brunt of family and community honour a women’s sexuality has to bear, and that her choices should benefit everyone in the society but herself:

“Cunt now becomes seat,
Abode, home, lair, nest, stable,
And he opens my legs wider
And shoves harder and I am torn apart to
Contain the meanings of family, race, stock, and caste
And form of existence and station fixed by birth.”

The poem ends with the emergence of the woman’s ‘cunningness’ as she starts pretending in an attempt to not displease the man. “I am frightened. I turn frigid. I turn faker.”

- 2) In “*Backstreet Girls*”, she challenges the chastity forced upon women with the sense of solidarity between women who refuse to fit into the archetype and stand together to fight opposition.
- 3) In “*Six Hours of Chastity*”, she unveils the cravings of self- righteous men who often mask themselves in piousness in order to maintain their holy position. The human ness that they hide to portray themselves as higher beings is knocked down in her poem. A priest visiting a whorehouse is unbelievable, but real and Meena affirms this. The apparent holiness in humans is a sham.
- 4) Having sharp antenna for injustice, Meena’s scorching 2014 debut, ‘*The Gypsy Goddess*’, explored caste, poverty and violence in Southern India, her native place, which she presented very widely in her writings.

But her second bombastic novel depicts the tale of solitude of a newly-wed writer experiencing rapid social isolation and extreme violence at her husband’s paws. And this autobiographical novel ‘*When I Hit You: Or a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife*’ gives us a woman at whom society cannot spit or throw stones, because this her is she who is made up of words on a page, and the lines she mutters are those that everyone hears in their own voice.

Meena’s poetry is a powerful testimony to anti-caste feminist literature. She re-constructs the images of women inherited from upper-caste male literature. She empowers through words, bringing out the strength of language.

The platform that her writing bestowed her with is curative and here she quotes,

“Men are afraid of any women who make poetry and dangerous portents.
Unable to predict when, for what, and for whom she
Will open her mouth, unable to stitch up her lips,
They silence her.”

A pen in woman’s hand can rattle up patriarchy, for this gives her immense power: to educate, agitate and organise. It gives them the power to militate. This is what even Helene Cixous reveals in “*The Laugh of Medusa*”, about female writing. The way female writers can express themselves at deep, male writers can never do so. And it is the only female writer, who has to work hard in order to overcome her ruptures and reach the moment of liberation by her writings. Like her body, her writing is also overflowing. This is what Meena has shown by her writings and one of her poetry collection ‘Touch’ based upon the female writing which amplifies and illustrates this very well by quoting,

“We: their daughters,
We: the daughters of their soil
We, mostly, write.”

Critical Analysis of ‘When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife’

‘*When I Hit You*’ is a smart, fierce and courageous, a dissection of what love meant, means and will come to mean when trust is undermined by violence, is a story told in the first person. It is a brilliant, throat-tightening feminist discourse on battered faces and bruised male egos; and a scathing portrait of traditional wedlock in modern India. To disclose her injustice and predicament, she quotes following words here,

“This one true love which flourished for two, three years- left me wounded. I spent months scooped in bed, howling my heart out. In learning to forget him, I had to pick up what was left of me, the little fragments of individuality, like broken bangles, chipped glass, and colourful pebbles.”

The unmanned woman narrator talks about how she fell in love with a professor and married him. She is a writer, is widely read, has a throbbing intellect and he also seems to have similar thoughts in many things. But after marriage, things unravel slowly. Undermining her in every way, by taking away her freedom slowly by inflicting violence and emotionally blackmailing her.. Then, the demon reached the extent on beating her when she defies him and violently rapes her. This bleak violent situation formed part of her daily routine.

The beginning of every chapter is decorated with beautiful quote, with blend of beauty, power and thoughts. The predicament that the heroine faced is enough to make our hearts cry and her acid life which was throwing her again and again in that dark pit.

But, still in spite of the dark, gloomy emotional landscape, the prose is beautiful. It flows like a serene river taking us on a beautiful ride, showing us sights and smells and sounds which are beautiful, wonderful, delightful. This clearly reflects the intellectual mind set of Kandasamy.

She has captured the reader's mind by beautifully explaining the landscapes of relationship between men and women, about the depth and inadequacy of language, about the infinite varieties of love, about the relationship between parents children, about communism and capitalism and the grey areas in between how we get used to and normalize violence within our family, about how one would go to any lengths to save a marriage, about silence and speech and how sometimes silence is louder than speech, about the rare words which describe beautiful things which are unique to a particular language and culture.

In nut shell, the novel showcases the patriarchal mind set of the stereotypes, that they buy rights over someone's rights, respect and existence. They really need to shuffle their mind set, or should be ready for setback, as to harm someone's existence is not their birth right.

Main Problems and Views

The problem is not with the doer, but with the victim who gets victimized on the gender grounds, which is an old conventional idea, which society lingers upon stickly. The gender discrimination of being woman and weak physically is what snatches their (stereotypes) power to think that 'before woman, she is a human'. To quote this, a Bengali poetess Sanjukta Dasgupta writes,

“Iam sangam and Shakti
Power of fire, water, air and earth.”

This above lines portray woman as an embodiment unyielding power, indomitable spirit and her contribution in being the part of this cosmos and the world she reflect through her incomparable existence.

And if we talk about the old conventional tradition, then one thing that must be cleared to everyone is that, ancient time has been bestowed as the golden age for women with respect to caste, gender as well as rights. Padmini Sen Gupta's famous essay "The Position of Women In Ancient India" depicts her position in ancient period as the best period enjoyed by them and how after claiming of Manu, mystical sage ruler of the earth, her position got degraded by declaring her being dependent upon father at child age, on husband at young age and on children at old age. From there, her position started degrading. Society became stereotypical and started being acting like nucleus. So, the main problem lies with the stereotypical mind set, according to which society is of the view that a woman is a handover device, which they are meant to use according to their convenience and who is also taken as liability by majority of the society and the downtrodden thinking that 'she is a woman' and in the race of phallocentrism, they forget that she is a human too.

There is no denying fact that she can be too wrong in many arenas, she can too at fault, but according to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have no damn right to violate anyone's

rights respect and to raise hand. Every creature is dignified; every creature is god's creation. These all shackles and fake conventional ideas have been passed since ages on the name of traditions and rituals, which is not acceptable at all.

Conclusion

In our society, violence is deep-rooted and bursting. It is present almost in every arena and nowhere is this eruption more intense than right behind the doors of our homes. Behind closed doors, people are being tortured, beaten and killed. And it is not only restricted to villages, in fact it is happening in urban areas, in metro cities as well. It is crossing all the social classes, genders, social lines and age groups. It is becoming a legacy being passed on from one generation to another.

“Guns make small men feel big.”

Oliver Gaspirtz

The above statement does hold the truth. Being a man, being a domestic tyrant is what make men to feel like every time they are carrying licensed gun of dominancy with them, and this pseudo-privilege make them to feel like a MAN, which they are not even worthy of a human-being. The very false notion, that bursting loudly, being dominating, is the only way to remind women of their gender and rights is worth banishing. The epoch is waiting to make men realize of their false privilege that shuddering of women's pride and respect is their born right and it's their pride concern to swell upon.

The violence has a tendency to explode in various forms- such as physical, sexual or emotional. There are many myths surrounding domestic violence. First and the most common one is –

- 1) Alcohol and Drugs make men violent. Blaming drinks or drugs is an excuse, A way of denying responsibility.
- 2) Second myth is that it happens in poor families. Anyone can be abused, no matter where they live or how much money they have.
- 3) The last one is stress and short temper. Women experience stress too, but they never go on extent of beating their partners.

The truth lies here is that, it is the desire to control over woman, the desire to exploit someone for personal benefits, the flare to be in a commanding position all the time showcasing one's supremacy.

But in all this mess, a woman has to realize her worth and need to understand, “If you cannot love yourself, you cannot love the world.” So, it is very important to realize the motive of your existence and to live with a life weapon, which helped Meena Kandasamy too to fight back, which she quoted as under:-

She writes,

“Hope prevents me from taking my own life.

Hope is the kind voice in my head that prevents me from fleeing.

Hope is the traitor that chains me to this marriage.”

So, ‘Either live your life or live repenting for not having lived it.’

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