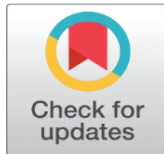


TEXT AS STAGE AND TRAUMA AS PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF MEENA KANDASAMY'S WORKS FROM A THERAPEUTIC PERSPECTIVE

Sabitha Kuriakose ¹, Dr. D. Lourdhu Mary ²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore 641021, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore 641021, India



Received 21 March 2026
Accepted 26 April 2026
Published 18 May 2026

Corresponding Author
Sabitha Kuriakose,
sabithasiby22@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i7s.2026.7410](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i7s.2026.7410)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how text, performance, and trauma intersect in the works of Meena Kandasamy, presenting her fiction as a powerful space where storytelling becomes both performative and therapeutic. Drawing on trauma theory, performance studies, and bibliotherapy, the study reimagines the literary text as a kind of “stage” where lived experiences of violence, resistance, and healing are enacted. Works such as *When I Hit You* and *Exquisite Cadavers* are examined as performative narratives that foreground the body not only as a site where trauma is inscribed, but also as a medium through which resistance is expressed, mirroring elements of theatre and visual composition. The paper argues that Kandasamy’s distinctive narrative techniques, fragmentation, repetition, shifting voices, and visual disruptions within the text resemble theatrical and cinematic strategies, turning the act of reading into an immersive, almost performative experience. This quality allows trauma to be externalized while also encouraging a deeper emotional and psychological engagement from readers, aligning closely with the principles of bibliotherapy. In this sense, readers are not passive observers but active participants who witness, interpret, and emotionally respond, leading to moments of empathy, reflection, and even catharsis. Furthermore, the study situates her work within the broader context of visual and performing arts by drawing connections to stagecraft, performance art, and testimonial theatre. The “textual body” in her fiction parallels the performing body, constantly negotiating silence and voice, vulnerability and agency. Ultimately, this paper suggests that Kandasamy’s fiction redefines trauma narratives as therapeutic performances, opening up new possibilities for integrating literary studies with visual and performing arts to better understand trauma and healing.

Keywords: Performance Studies, Visual Culture, Dramaturgy, Bibliotherapy, Embodied Performance, Trauma Narrative



1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, literary representations of trauma have moved beyond simple documentation of suffering to become performative acts of resistance and political testimony. Particularly in contemporary feminist writing, trauma is not only narrated but reenacted, re embodied, and re staged through language, rhythm, and form. This performative turn has opened new ways of reading fiction as a site of freeing, witnessing, and collective healing. Within this context, Meena Kandasamy’s works- *The Gypsy Goddess*, *When I Hit You*, and *Exquisite Cadavers*- stand out for their highly visual and rhythmically charged prose. Her works showcase visual imagery, fragmented narratives, and a theatrical tempo that recall the aesthetics of performing arts such as theatre, dance, and performance art. In her books, the pages serve as a

stage where pain, memory, and protest are not only described but also visually arranged and performatively enacted, taking readers into a shared, firsthand space of trauma and resistance.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

While trauma fiction has received extensive attention in Western literary and theoretical scholarship, the specific performative and therapeutic variations of Indian feminist trauma narratives remain underexplored. Most of the existing critical work on Meena Kandasamy foregrounds themes of caste oppression, gendered violence, and political resistance. Still, critics rarely examine how her writing style itself functions as a performative and therapeutic process that involves both writer and reader. Her unconventional experimental forms, like repetition, addressing the reader, abrupt shifts in tone, and visually dense descriptions, suggest a mode of storytelling that is closer to stage performance than to traditional realist narration. Without a systematic engagement from critics with performance theory and bibliotherapy, however, these formal strategies remain undertheorized, and their role in shaping the reader's emotional and therapeutic response is not fully accounted for.

3. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it bridges literary analysis with insights from medical humanities and performance studies, proposing that Kandasamy's fiction operates as a "textual stage" where trauma is not merely recounted but enacted and, in some sense, relieved. By reading her works through the lenses of performance theory, trauma theory, and bibliotherapy, the paper highlights how literature can become a liminal space for processing pain, witnessing survival, and generating empathy. This interdisciplinary approach also enriches debates on feminist and Dalit literature, showing that the aesthetic choices of such writers are not merely stylistic but deeply ethical and therapeutic. Establishing this connection between narrative form and healing potential contributes to a broader understanding of how literary texts can function as tools for psychological and social recovery, especially in contexts of structural violence and marginalization.

4. RESEARCH GAP

Existing studies on Meena Kandasamy predominantly focus on socio political themes, domestic abuse, caste massacres, and feminist resistance, while paying relatively little attention to the performative and healing capacities of her narrative techniques. Several critics have analyzed the ideological and activist dimensions of *The Gypsy Goddess*, *When I Hit You*, and *Exquisite Cadavers*; however, they never situate these works within frameworks of performance theory or bibliotherapy. Moreover, although the visual and bodily elements in her writing are often noted, the connection between visual imagery, performativity, and therapeutic reading remains largely unaddressed. There is, therefore, a critical gap in understanding how Kandasamy's formal experimentation, such as the use of fragmented scenes, rhythmic repetition, and direct address, transforms the text into a performative space that invites reader participation and emotional catharsis. This study aims to fill that gap by explicitly linking her narrative strategies to the logic of performance and the practice of bibliotherapy.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The central aim of this paper is to investigate how Meena Kandasamy's narrative style reconfigures trauma as a shared, performative experience and to explore the therapeutic potential of reading her works.

- 1) To examine how Meena Kandasamy uses performative narration and visual symbolism to reconfigure trauma as a shared experience.
- 2) To analyze how Kandasamy's texts merge literature and performing arts to enable catharsis and healing.
- 3) To explore how bibliotherapy and performance theory together explain the therapeutic potential of Kandasamy's narrative style.

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive textual analysis strategy, grounded in close reading of language, form, and imagery in Meena Kandasamy's three major prose works: *The Gypsy Goddess*, *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, and *Exquisite Cadavers*. The primary aim is not empirical generalization but a nuanced, theory

driven interpretation of how narrative structure, visual imagery, and performative voice interact to produce particular emotional and therapeutic effects for readers. By systematically examining selected passages that foreground traumatic scenes, bodily metaphors, repetitions, and direct address, the paper seeks to demonstrate how these textual features mimic the strategies of performing arts such as theatre, dance, and performance art.

The analytical approach is intentionally integrative, combining performance theory, trauma theory, feminist theory, and visual/body theory to read the texts as staged performances of trauma. Performance theory helps identify “restored” or twice behaved behaviors, scenes that are repeated, re framed, and stylized, while trauma theory accounts for how these repetitions mirror the structural characteristics of traumatic memory. Feminist theory provides the political and ethical lens for interpreting the female narrator as a performer who reclaims agency through testimony and embodiment, and visual/body theory enables the reading of graphic imagery and bodily metaphors as choreographed tableaux of pain. This multi layered framework allows the study to move beyond thematic summary toward a close examination of how narrative style itself functions as a performative and therapeutic practice.

The researcher assumes the role of an engaged reader spectator, attending not only to what is narrated but to how it is narrated: the spatial layout of pages, the use of short paragraphs and line breaks, the tonal shifts, and the recurrent motifs that resemble stage directions or visual cues. By doing so, the methodology treats the text as a virtual stage, where trauma is enacted, re enacted, and re directed, and the reader is positioned as an active participant in the witnessing process. This approach aligns with recent calls in medical humanities and bibliotherapy scholarship to connect theoretical models of literary trauma with the concrete experience of reading, thereby bringing performance based and therapeutic insights into sharper focus within literary analysis.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bibliotherapy has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary practice that underscores the therapeutic potential of reading literature, particularly in the context of emotional and psychological trauma. At its core, bibliotherapy posits that readers can identify with fictional characters, experience emotional catharsis, and reconstruct their own narratives through engagement with literary texts. Through processes of identification and empathetic projection, literature offers a safe distance from which readers can confront painful experiences, re frame them, and sometimes achieve a sense of post traumatic growth. Recent scholarship in medical humanities and clinical psychology has emphasized how narrative reconstruction, reliving, and re telling trauma in a controlled aesthetic form can facilitate psychological healing and resilience. At the same time, a growing body of work argues that theoretical trauma studies and actual bibliotherapeutic practices remain insufficiently integrated, calling for more nuanced models that connect literary form, reader response, and therapeutic outcomes. This gap is especially relevant when analyzing contemporary feminist and trauma fiction, where emotional intensity and narrative experimentation intersect directly with readers’ psychological engagement.

Performance theory provides a vital framework for understanding how lived experiences, including trauma, are re enacted, ritualized, and transformed in aesthetic forms. Drawing on the work of Richard Schechner, performance is conceptualized not only as staged theatre but as any repeated, framed behavior, what he terms “restored” or “twice behaved behavior.” In this sense, performance involves play, ritual, and repetition, turning everyday actions into intensified, symbolic acts. Schechner’s model of performance also highlights the liminal quality of the performative space: a “safe” yet charged zone where dangerous emotions, social conflicts, and bodily experiences can be enacted, observed, and re interpreted. This liminality closely parallels the way trauma is staged in literature, where painful events are re presented through rhythm, repetition, and structure, allowing both performers (narrators) and spectators (readers) to confront and re frame suffering. When applied to fiction, performance theory thus helps explain how narrative techniques, such as re enactment, repetition, and stylized address, function as mechanisms for emotional processing and aesthetic transformation.

Trauma theory foregrounds the difficulty of narrating overwhelming experiences, emphasizing that trauma often resists linear, coherent storytelling. In the wake of catastrophic events, memory tends to fragment, jump, repeat, and fracture time, making direct testimony elusive. Scholars in trauma studies have therefore stressed the centrality of testimony and witnessing: the imperative to speak, to be heard, and to be acknowledged by an audience. Narrative strategies such as fragmentation, temporal disruption, looping repetitions, and shifting narrative voices are often read as formal responses to the unspeakable quality of trauma. These techniques not only mirror the structure of traumatic memory but also create a kind of re enactment on the page, where the event is returned to again and again, each time

from a slightly different angle. In this sense, literary narrative becomes a performative space of testimony, where the act of writing and reading functions as a dual process of recall and witnessing. Recognizing these strategies as performative enables a deeper appreciation of how trauma fiction invites readers to participate in the ethical labor of witnessing, rather than simply spectating from a distance.

Recent critical work on Meena Kandasamy has significantly illuminated the thematic and political dimensions of her fiction, particularly in relation to domestic violence, gendered oppression, caste atrocity, and feminist resistance. Several articles devoted to *When I Hit You* foreground the novel's function as a testimonial of psychological and physical abuse, highlighting how the narrator's voice reconstructs the experience of coercive control and emotional entrapment. Critics often describe this narration as politically charged and transformative, emphasizing its capacity to challenge patriarchal norms and to empower the female subject through articulate self representation. Similarly, studies of *The Gypsy Goddess* examine the novel's response to the Kilvenmani massacre, underscoring its role as a literary memorial and a site of collective testimony. In these readings, Kandasamy's work is frequently characterized as both documentary and activist, merging personal and historical trauma into a powerful critique of caste and gender violence. Yet, although these studies register the emotional and political force of her narratives, few systematically analyze the formal devices, fragmentation, rhythm, visual layout, and embodied voice that shape the reader's affective engagement.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Kandasamy's thematic concerns, there remains a notable gap in understanding how her formal experimentation functions as a kind of textual performance with therapeutic implications for readers. While critics have explored the testimonial and political value of *When I Hit You* and *The Gypsy Goddess*, they rarely connect these insights to performance theory or bibliotherapy, and fewer still attend to the ways visual layout, bodily metaphors, and staged voice contribute to the reader's emotional and psychological response. Minimal work treats her narrative style, its repetitions, scenic segmentation, direct address, and highly visualized bodily scenes, as an aesthetic and performative strategy that invites readers into a participatory process of witnessing and catharsis. This absence is particularly striking in the context of medical humanities and literary studies on trauma, where the interaction between narrative form, reader experience, and healing remains an underdeveloped area. The present study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by arguing that Kandasamy's fiction operates as a performative, visually charged textual stage where trauma is not only represented but also re enacted and re directed toward therapeutic possibilities for both the narrator and the reader.

7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Performance theory, especially Richard Schechner's model of "restored behavior," helps us read Meena Kandasamy's texts as repeated, staged enactments of trauma rather than flat descriptions. Restored behavior is an action that is framed, rehearsed, and re done in a way that intensifies its emotional and symbolic charge. In *Exquisite Cadavers*, for example, the protagonist Maya's childhood trauma surfaces in recurring, short, almost cinematic flashes, scattered memories of sexual harassment and familial neglect that are replayed throughout the narrative like repeated scenes in a play. Each return to these moments does not just "tell" the trauma again; it replays it in a new emotional tone, mimicking the rehearsal and variation characteristic of theatre.

Similarly, in *The Gypsy Goddess*, the massacre sequence is broken into multiple perspectives and fragmented vignettes that resemble a stage ensemble: the villagers, the landlords, the officials, and the dead each take their turn in the spotlight. The famous "ochre sparrows are on fire" passage, where the whole landscape is visually set ablaze, functions less like a realist description and more like a choreographed tableau, burning bodies and environment together in a single, highly stylized scene. This virtual staging turns the page into a stage where the Kilvenmani massacre is not only narrated but ritually re enacted, inviting the reader spectator to witness the horror as a collective performance rather than merely a report.

Trauma theory explains why these restagings are necessary: traumatic events resist smooth, linear narration and instead return as repetitions, gaps, and shocks. In *When I Hit You*, the narrator's account of domestic violence loops back to nearly identical scenes of abuse, humiliation, and gaslighting, each time reframed slightly by new metaphors or perspectives. Critics have noted how Kandasamy uses stylistic repetition not to desensitize the reader but to mirror the compulsive re lived quality of trauma; the text thus becomes a textual analogue of re enactment rather than casual storytelling.

The novel's structure recalls a kind of testimonial performance: the narrator speaks directly to the reader, as if addressing a courtroom or an audience, admitting early that her husband demanded that she "write it down" to leave him a "constant reminder" of his crimes. This demand is reversed in the text, where writing becomes the woman's act of testimony and resistance. Recent work in medical humanities and trauma bibliotherapy argues that such re enactments in literature can function therapeutically by allowing both narrator and reader to contain, re order, and partially master the overwhelming experience. In this sense, *When I Hit You* becomes a dual space: a record of trauma and a controlled, aestheticized stage where pain is repeated, re framed, and slowly re ordered into a survivable narrative.

Feminist theory enables us to see Kandasamy's narrators not only as victims of violence but as performers who reclaim agency by staging their pain. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the old woman who narrates part of the "Kilvenmani story" repeatedly insists on her right to speak, even as dominant narratives try to erase or sanitize the massacre. Her monologues and digressions mimic the voice of a solo performer on stage, insisting on visibility where the state and the media would prefer silence. Her body, language, and memory all become acts of feminist resistance, turning oral testimony into a kind of political theatre.

In *When I Hit You*, the narrator likewise performs her own subjectivity: she name calls the husband back, turns court documents and legal forms into materials of satire, and openly confesses her desire, rage, and shame. The text is filled with passages that resemble a confessional monologue, spoken not to a therapist but to an imagined collective audience. Feminist theory thus allows us to read these women as performers who re direct the male gaze, re claim their bodies, and transform private suffering into a public, political act. The novel is thereby not just about abuse; it stages the narrator's passage from violated object to speaking subject, like a drama whose arc moves from domination to performative self assertion.

Visual and body theory support the reading of Kandasamy's images as "choreographies of pain." In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the landscape is saturated with visual metaphors of fire and burning; bodies, thatch roofs, and animals are all consumed in a single, hallucinatory image cluster that recalls a stage backdrop painted in scarlet and smoke. Villagers are described with vivid, almost theatrical intensity, women winding "fire around their hips," girls carrying flames in their hair, turning the Dalit body into a visual symbol of both victimhood and spectral endurance.

In *When I Hit You*, the narrator's body is constantly in the frame: her clothing, her posture, her bruises, and her self violence are rendered in highly visual terms. The repeated scenes of cigarette burns, slaps, and self harm read like carefully lit tableaux, choreographing the infliction and reception of pain. The reader is made to "look" at these wounds, which are not merely private injuries but public signs of gendered violence. At the same time, these images also stage resistance: the narrator's decision to leave, to write, to display her trauma in the novel reframes the wounded body as a site of visibility and defiance. In *Exquisite Cadavers*, Maya's fragmented self is mirrored in the fragmented layout of the text, short sections, abrupt shifts, and visual white spaces, so that the page itself becomes a body cut into pieces and re assembled.

Thus, through visual and body theory, Kandasamy's prose becomes analogous to performance art: the body is staged, scratched, split, and re patched, and the reader is positioned as a spectator witness whose gaze participates in the ethical and aesthetic negotiation of pain and resistance.

8. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

8.1. TRAUMA AS PERFORMANCE

In *When I Hit You*, trauma is not a single, closed event but a repeated performance of violence that returns in nearly identical scenes of beatings, humiliation, and emotional coercion. The cyclical rhythm of abuse, physical assault followed by exaggerated apologies, then fresh escalation, creates a kind of scripted domestic theatre where the husband repeats "well rehearsed lines" designed to break the protagonist down. Each re enactment feels like a new "act" in the same unending play, with the kitchen, the bedroom, the phone, and the court becoming stage spaces where the familiar dynamics of domination and submission are restaged with slight variations each time.

Drawing on performance theory, these repetitions can be read as "restored behavior" (Schechner): the violence is framed, rehearsed, and stylized on the page, no longer a private, invisible ordeal but a public, textual performance. By looping back to almost the same scenes each time reframed through new metaphors or perspectives, Kandasamy makes the reader witness the performative repetition of trauma, not as mere spectacle but as a controlled, aestheticized re presentation that allows both narrator and reader to observe, name, and re direct the horror. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the

Kilvenmani massacre similarly returns in fragmented, overlapping scenes narrated by different witnesses, turning the historical event into a collective performance where the same violence is re enacted from multiple angles, as if the text were staging a multi voiced tragic play.

8.2. VISUAL IMAGERY IN NARRATION

Kandasamy's visual language transforms narrative into a stage like spectacle, especially in *The Gypsy Goddess* and *Exquisite Cadavers*. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the massacre is rendered as a series of tableaux: women stripped and flogged in front of the village, Dalit bodies tied to trees, and the infamous image of ochre sparrows on fire. These scenes function less like expository prose and more like a series of choreographed tableaux, with vivid, painterly detail that invites the reader to "see" rather than just "read" the violence.

In *Exquisite Cadavers*, the novel's structure itself imitates a visual and cinematic form. Built on the surrealist game of cadaver exquise, it assembles the story through fragmented, non linear vignettes that resemble cinematic cuts: scenes jump between Maya and Karim's domestic life, political protests, and the narrator's marginal reflections. The page layout, with alternating left hand notes and right hand narrative, further recalls the visual logic of montage and split screen performance, forcing the reader to visually orchestrate meaning across discontinuous images. Applying visual and body theory, these compositions stage trauma as a spectacular choreography of pain, where the reader becomes a spectator witness who must actively look, piece together, and re interpret the visual field.

8.3. BODY AND VOICE AS RESISTANCE

In all three novels, the female body appears as both wounded and resistant, turned into a performative sign of oppression and rebellion. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the Dalit women's bodies are literally used as public "repositories of tales" when they are arrested, stripped, and flogged in front of the village. Their naked, branded bodies become a horrifying stage where caste power is performed, but the text also reclaims these bodies by keeping them visible, refusing to let official narratives erase them.

In *When I Hit You*, the narrator's body is constantly in the frame: bruises, burns, self inflicted cuts, and the visible effects of psychological abuse are described in intimate, visual detail. These wounds are not merely private injuries; they are turned into public evidence of gendered violence, staged as if the reader is watching a stage monologue about bodily violation. The narrator's voice functions like a solo theatrical performance: direct address, confession, irony, and self naming ("In the act of writing, I am no longer just a victim; I am a survivor, an artist shaping my own story") turn her speech into an embodied act of resistance (Kandasamy 223). Through feminist theory, we can read this as a performative reclaiming of voice and body from patriarchal and caste based silencing, transforming the text into a kind of one woman testimonial drama.

8.4. BIBLIOTHERAPY AND HEALING

Bibliotherapy frameworks help explain how this intense, performative staging of trauma can also generate healing and identification for readers. In *When I Hit You*, the narrator herself describes writing as a process of confrontation and re ordering: "Each word is a battle, each sentence a confrontation with the past that haunts me." This aligns with recent work in trauma bibliotherapy, which argues that re enacting painful experiences in narrative form allows for emotional processing and partial mastery of the past.portal.research. Joshi and Kaslikar (2026)

By framing abuse as a repeated, staged performance on the page, Kandasamy creates a controlled, aesthetic space where the reader can safely witness and process trauma without being physically inside it. The performative rhythm—repetition, direct address, humour, and irony—modulates the horror so that it becomes unbearable yet bearable, like a play that allows the audience to leave the theatre transformed rather than shattered. In *The Gypsy Goddess* and *Exquisite Cadavers*, the same mechanism operates: the riot like sequences and fragmented domestic scenes invite readers to feel the collective and personal weight of violence, yet the stylistic and structural artistry offers a sense of order and meaning, enabling catharsis and a form of vicarious recovery

9. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

9.1. KEY INSIGHTS

This study finds that Meena Kandasamy's works structurally and stylistically resemble **performing arts**, treating the text as a stage where trauma is repeatedly enacted rather than passively reported. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the massacre at Kilvenmani is rendered in a series of vivid, choreographed scenes stripped women dragged before the village, Dalit bodies tied to trees, and the infamous image of ochre sparrows on fire, each functioning as a **tableau vivant** that recalls a stage tableau more than a conventional narrative paragraph. Similarly, in *When I Hit You*, the domestic abuse sequence repeats nearly the same pattern: violence, apology, emotional manipulation, and fresh escalation, turning the marital home into a domestic theatre where the same "act" is replayed with slight variations each time.

In *Exquisite Cadavers*, the novella's structure formally mirrors performance: the left hand marginalia and right hand narrative constantly interrupt and re frame each other, producing a split stage effect comparable to a two part drama or intercut film scenes. Maya's psychologically fragmented self is mirrored in abrupt temporal cuts and looping repetitions, so that her trauma reads like a performance in which the same scenarios (quarrels, separations, reconciliations, infidelities) re appear from different emotional angles. Across all three texts, Kandasamy's use of repetition, scene like segmentation, and embodied voice turns the page into a stage where pain is both remembered and restaged.

Second, the novels function as textual stages where marginalized bodies and voices perform their pain and resistance before an implied audience of readers. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Dalit women such as Kanni and the unnamed striptease scene women are literally exhibited on a public "stage"; stripped, flogged, and verbally abused, their bodies become visible signs of caste and gendered oppression. Yet the text refuses to erase them, instead multiplying their perspectives and testimonies so that the massacre becomes a collective performance in which the marginalized community itself speaks back to the reader spectator. In *When I Hit You*, the narrator repeatedly stages her bruises, self burns, and psychological breakdowns as if under the gaze of an audience, forcing the reader to confront the material reality of domestic violence rather than read it as a vague metaphor.

Third, the study reveals that the female narrator is not only a sufferer but a performing subject who re claims agency by turning testimony into a public monologue. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the old woman who narrates parts of the Kilvenmani episode insists on her right to speak and intervene in the events, much like a solo performer who breaks the "fourth wall" to address the reader directly. In *When I Hit You*, the narrator's direct address and biting irony ("If you love me, this is the quickest way you will make up your mind," while he lights matchstick after matchstick) turn the text into a confessional monologue in which the husband's "performance" of control is met with the wife's performative refusal to accept the script. In *Exquisite Cadavers*, Maya's shifting perspectives and the author's parallel commentary in the margins produce a layered, almost multi act structure where the reader witnesses both the fiction and the real life performance behind it.

9.2. NEW UNDERSTANDING PROVIDED

This research shows that trauma fiction can be read not only as narrative testimony but also as performance, which significantly deepens our understanding of how literature facilitates witnessing and healing. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the massacre scenes are arranged so that the reader cannot look away; the text functions like a dark play staged block wise, with crowd scenes, trial like executions, and climactic outbursts of collective anger performing rather than merely describing caste violence. The reader becomes a spectator witness, implicated in the ethical demand to see, remember, and respond. Similarly, in *When I Hit You*, the cyclical abuse scenes are structured as a psychological drama in which the protagonist moves from silent complicity to vocal resistance, enacting on the page a kind of therapeutic performance of breakdown and recovery.

The study also demonstrates that bibliotherapy gains power when texts adopt performative, sensorial forms that mirror theatre's emotional intensity and ritual structure. In *When I Hit You*, the narrator's process of writing is explicitly framed as a battle with the past: each word is a confrontation, each sentence a re ordering of memory. The performative repetition of abuse scenes, the sharp shifts in tone from irony to rage to tenderness, and the direct address to the reader all create a controlled, aestheticized space in which the reader can safely experience, process, and partially master the horror.. In *Exquisite Cadavers*, the fragmented structure and the author's self reflexive notes turn the act of reading into

a kind of participatory performance, where the reader is invited to assemble the story bit by bit, much like assembling a cadavre exquis itself.

Thus, the study argues that Kandasamy's fiction operates as a therapeutic performance stage, where trauma is re enacted in a way that enables both narrator and reader to re interpret, re frame, and ultimately re direct their relationship to pain.

10. CONCLUSION

This study argues that Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, *When I Hit You*, and *Exquisite Cadavers* transform the text into a stage where trauma is not only narrated but also performed, visualized, and embodied. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the Kilvenmani massacre is staged as a series of tableaux and crowd scenes, with Dalit women's bodies turned into public signs of caste and gendered violence yet also into focal points of collective resistance and memory. In *When I Hit You*, domestic abuse repeats as a scripted domestic theatre in which the same patterns of violence and control are re enacted in different emotional keys, allowing both narrator and reader to witness the horror and to participate in the process of re interpretation. In *Exquisite Cadavers*, the text's split stage form left marginalia side stage reflections and right hand narrative front stage action creates a multi layered performance where personal and political dramas intersect.

The paper confirms that Kandasamy's narrative strategies, repetition, scene like segmentation, direct address, and embodied voice operate like performance, turning trauma into a staged, restaged spectacle rather than a static description. It shows that these texts invite therapeutic engagement by functioning as a kind of bibliotherapy: readers identify with the narrator's suffering, experience catharsis through repetition and irony, and gradually re interpret the violence as something that can be named, confronted, and contained. Finally, feminist and body/visual theories clarify how resistance is staged through the body and voice: in *The Gypsy Goddess*, through the visible, defiant bodies of Dalit women; in *When I Hit You*, through the narrator's self burning, self naming, and ironic direct address; and in *Exquisite Cadavers*, through the split stage performance of Maya and the author's parallel commentary.

This study contributes to literary studies, trauma theory, and medical humanities by bringing performing arts, trauma studies, and bibliotherapy into a single interpretive framework for reading Indian feminist fiction. It offers a model for future analyses of what can be called "performing" trauma texts: works where narrative form itself—fragmentation, repetition, direct address, visual imagery—functions as a kind of stage that enables witnessing, resistance, and recovery.

11. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future work could extend this framework to other South Asian women writers who represent trauma in formally experimental ways, such as Dalit and Muslim feminist authors whose texts similarly stage caste, religious, and gendered violence as public performances. Another productive line of inquiry would be comparative studies of Kandasamy's works with film and theatre adaptations of trauma narratives, examining how the same stories are translated back into literal stage and screen, and what is lost or gained in the transfer. Finally, scholars and practitioners could develop practical bibliotherapy programs that use novels like *When I Hit You* and *The Gypsy Goddess* in therapeutic or pedagogical settings, guided by the insight that the performative, aesthetic framing of trauma enhances readers' capacity to witness, process, and transform pain.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- . *Between Theater and Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- . *Exquisite Cadavers*. Atlantic Books, 2019.
- . *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. Atlantic Books, 2017.
- “An Analysis of Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2023, pp. 1088–1100.
- “An Analysis of Violence and Trauma in Meena Kandasamy’s Fictions.” *Cuestiones de Fisioterapia*, vol. 1, 2025, pp. 1–10.
- “Analyzing the Use of Language in Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *Journal of English Studies*, 2019, pp. 1–15. academia.edu/100623117/ANALYSING_THE_USE_OF_LANGUAGE_IN_MEENA_KANDASAMYS_THE_GYPSY_GODDESS.
- “Assertion of Self in Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *Journal of Social and Educational Research*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1–12. ir.avinuty.ac.in/server/api/core/bitstreams/ffb79cc41d1d45e08be64e1e23102d5a/content.
- “Excerpt: *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* by Meena Kandasamy.” *Hindustan Times Books*, 26 May 2017, www.hindustantimes.com/books/excerpt-when-i-hit-you-or-a-portrait-of-the-writer-as-a-young-wife-by-meena-kandasamy/story/.
- “Horror, Empathy and Justice in *The Gypsy Goddess* by Meena Kandasamy.” *Hybrid*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2015, pp. 9–22. journals.openedition.org/hybrid/pdf/3409.
- “Meena Kandasamy Claims Space for Herself in *Exquisite Cadavers*.” NPR, 8 Nov. 2020, www.npr.org/2020/11/08/932102119/meena-kandasamy-claims-space-for-herself-in-exquisite-cadavers.
- “Resistance in Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *Journal of Global English Studies*, vol. 7, no. 6, 2019, pp. 82–88.
- “The Narrative Techniques in Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *International Journal of Research in Textual Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2021, pp. 45–52.
- “Trauma and Feminist Poetics in Meena Kandasamy’s Work.” *International Journal of English Studies and Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2026, pp. 569–572.
- Ahuja, Medhavi, and Sujata. “Exploring Abuse and Trauma in Meena Kandasamy’s *When I Hit You*.” *Library Progress International*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2022, pp. 63–70.
- Balit, Carmen R. *Designing Meena Kandasamy’s Exquisite Cadavers: A Visual and Structural Interventions in the Novel*. SPINE, 2019, spine.balit.net/carmen-r-balit-design-meena-kandasamy-exquisite-cadavers.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Gudhate, Sameer. “*When I Hit You: A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife—A Review*.” Facebook, 19 Nov. 2025, www.facebook.com/IndianBookmarkbySameerGudhate/posts/sameer-gudhate-presents-the-book-review-of-when-i-hit-you-by-meena-kandasamy.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, 1992.
- Joshi, A., and Kaslikar, P. (2026). Raga Music and Emotional Balance: A Psychological and Literature-Based Study. *ShodhGyan-NU: Journal of Literature and Culture Studies*, 4(1), 97–100. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhgyan.v4.i1.2026.101>
- Kandasamy, Meena. *The Gypsy Goddess*. HarperCollins, 2014.
- Kurniawan, Dede R. “Violence, Trauma, and Abuse in Meena Kandasamy’s *When I Hit You*.” *The ASPD Journal of English Studies*, vol. 11, no. 11s, 2025, pp. 342–350.
- Mallick, Ratna, and Swati Pati. “A Paradigm Shift: Gender Violence in *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy.” *Kaleidoscope: Special Issue on Meena Kandasamy*, 2025, pp. 1–12.
- Mazza, Nicholas, et al. “Current Bibliotherapeutic Practices and Literary Trauma Studies.” *Trauma and Literature Project, Research portal*, Lund University, 2024. portal.research.lu.se/en/publications/trauma-and-literature-current-bibliotherapeutic-practices-and-lit/.
- Mazza, Nicholas. “Bibliotherapy in Addressing Emotional Trauma.” *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*, vol. 9, no. 12, 2024, pp. 1–10.
- Mazza, Nicholas. *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2017.
- Nair, S. Sowmya. “A Critical Analysis of Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology*, vol. 6, no. 10, 2020, pp. 25–28.
- Park, J. S. “Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*: A Pedagogy of Resistance.” *Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45–60.
- Purohit, Suneeta. “Revolution in Space: Meena Kandasamy’s *The Gypsy Goddess*.” *ASIAN English Language Literature*, vol. 10, 2018, pp. 112–125.

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2020.

Singh, Ananya. "Meena Kandasamy's Exquisite Cadavers." *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, 10 July 2025, www.chajournal.com/2025/07/11/exquisite/.

Sohn, Crystal. "When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife by Meena Kandasamy—Review." *The Millions*, 12 Mar. 2023, www.themillions.com/books-reviews/when-i-hit-you-or-a-portrait-of-the-writer-as-a-young-wife-1786491265.