

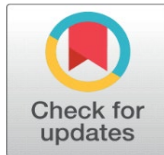
# PSYCHIC ERASURE: PSYCHODYNAMICS AND FEMALE SELF-MAKING IN MEENA KANDASAMY'S WHEN I HIT YOU

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## ABSTRACT

In this research paper, the notion of psychic erasure will be analyzed as gendered dynamics of internalized silence and fragmentation in *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy. Outgrowing the largely sociopolitical interpretations of marital violence, the analysis predicts the psychodynamic aspects of oppression to claim that the institution of patriarchal power is not only executed by means of extrinsic control, but also by the systematic degradation of female subjectivity. Here the psychic erasure is theorized as an inhibition, perversion and re-arrangement of memory, identity, and affect in circumstances of the coercive relationality. The paper is based on a feminist psychodynamic framework, which incorporates the knowledge of psychoanalysis, trauma theory as well as feminist narratology in further analysis of how the novel depicts the fragmented consciousness of the protagonist in terms of narrative discontinuities, repetition and meta fictional self-reflexivity. These formal tactics are viewed to be inscriptions of trauma and not just a stylistic experimentation. Simultaneously, the paper shows the role that writing plays as a counter discursive practice that turns repression into articulation and vulnerability into agency. The analysis will be done in two phases where tracing the processes by which intimate partner violence generates psychic disintegration, internalized subordination and analyzing how narrative self-fashioning generates a process of resistant self-making. By so doing the paper locates autobiographical writing as a psychodynamic act of recreation, a process whereby silenced experiences are both re-signified and re-inserted into the cultural discourse. The study adds to the feminist literary analytical literature by providing a sensitive description of the way interiority is created, broken, and re-created within the patriarchal environment. It suggests that the story of Kandasamy not only reveals the operations of psychic erasure, but applies its reversal, thus reformulating female authorship as a type of epistemic and affective resistance.

**Keywords:** Psychic Erasure, Feminist Psychodynamics, Trauma, Narrative Identity, Gynocriticism, Patriarchy, Resistance, Narrative



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of female agency in patriarchal systems has been the main point of feminist literary research so as to anticipate violence, silence and resistance. Meena Kandasamy delivers an interesting contribution to the discussion of marital violence in *When I Hit You* by not only expanding the scope of the issue into the psychic sphere of life, where domination is internalized and bargained, but also by addressing it in the most substantial forms. Women writing have been theorized by feminist critics like Elaine Showalter (1977) as a space of self-inscription and structural positioning of woman as 'Other' by Simone de Beauvoir (1949). This is further complicated by Judith Butler (1990) who argues that

gendered subjectivity is produced through repetitive performative action within regulatory formations, hence implying that identity is created by internalized norms and not an in-built condition. Subjectivity therefore is a provisional location of agency rather than a fixed location, where domination is exercised in intimate manners of obedience, injured attachment and self-control, a process that Butler recognizes as akin to her perception of subjection as both constitutive and limiting of the subject in terms of psychic adhesion to power (Butler, 1997). As Judith Butler famously notes, "Subjection signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (Butler 1997, 2) which is central to psychic erasure and works well through action of subjectivity. Equally, psychoanalytic thinking based on the ideas of Sigmund Freud (1900) and reshaped by Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Jessica Benjamin (1988) has focused on the significance of unconscious and relational processes in the formation of gendered subjectivity. Jessica Benjamin's classic proposition that domination arises through a "breakdown of mutual recognition" (Benjamin 1988, 12) is useful here, because psychic erasure may be considered as the descent of recognition into coercive relationality. Building on the same argument, Sara Ahmed (2004) highlights the social construction and distribution of emotions, which entails the introduction of power into the sphere of affective life and establishes the continuation of patterns of obedience and attachment. Meanwhile, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1996) theorizes traumatic experience as something that is difficult to represent directly, and tends to reoccur in gradual and repetitious forms of narration, which is especially pertinent to the shattered voice and broken self-expression of selected Kandasamy's text. Socio-politically, authors like Amartya Sen (2010), Julie Billaud and Direnberger (2021) noted how gendered violence is normalized, and the subjective experience remains unacknowledged by institutions. Nonetheless, in spite of these important contributions, current research has given a lot of privilege to extra-psychic and discursive explanations of violence at the expense of little known intra-psychic processes through which patriarchal power is internalized and reproduced in the female psyche which includes repression, dissociation, and affective compliance.

The current work fills this gap by promoting psychic erasure as an intellectual framework towards studying the intersection of external and internal coercion and psychic restructuring. This research defines psychic erasure as the progressive undermining or displacement in the face of enduring regimes of domination of subjectivity, where an individual memory, desire, agency, and self-recognition are internally controlled, dispossessed or de-subjectified. Wendy Brown's insight that "wounded attachments" can become sites where domination is psychically reproduced (Brown 1995, 52) helps explain psychic erasure not as a repressive state but as an affective structure of injured attachment. Likewise Kelly Oliver's insistence that "subjectivity is produced in response and address" (Oliver 2001, 15) shows how erasure also involves foreclosure of witnessing itself. In a qualitative textual and psychodynamic interpretation of *When I Hit You*, the paper examines violence as material and unconscious, which creates fragmentation and at the same time creates resistant possibilities by telling the story. This work incorporates the feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory and affect theory where it adds to the modern literary criticism by formulating an idea of feminine self-making as a process of perpetual negotiation of domination and resistance (Braidotti, 1994 and Berlant, 2011). Contrary to the trauma theory which tends to favour the affective consequences of the violence, psychic erasure presents the foreground of structural reorganization of the psyche subject to recurring imposed inscription. On the same note, when theories of silencing focus on silencing of speech, psychic erasure shifts the focus of analysis to the inside sedimentation of silence as a psychic government (Oliver, 2001). Not as a fixed place of agency, subjectivity is therefore a disputed territory of erosion, in which domination is instituted by intimate modalities of compliance, hurt attachment, and self-regulation. Psychic erasure, in this sense is a unique theoretical intervention since it opens the eyes to the truth of the interdependence of coercion and complicity, external violence and internal fragmentation. Significantly, it is not the process that can be reduced to the level of individual psychology but rather, it is incorporated within socio-cultural and institutional frameworks that predetermine the perception, memory, and the affective life. Psychic erasure can thus be interpreted as a methodical disowning of trauma and agency in patriarchal and caste based hierarchies where internalized injunctions of passivity and obedience act as regulative forces that sieve out and repress aspects of subjectivity which are beyond the norm. Psychic erasure also intersects with what Gayatri Spivak calls the persistent problem that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 1988, 308), not because speech is devoid, but because structures of identification judge the same. This kind of psychic control results in fractured self schemas whereby the elements of self are not only suppressed but also slowly obliterated as intelligible in the first place (Oliver, 2001 and Brown, 1995).

Meena Kandasamy's literary works offer an interesting place to consider these dynamics. Her writings not only record the events of marital and systemic violence, but also formally perform the conflicts between silencing and articulation. In *When I Hit You*, the story prefigures the psychic bargains of the subject who is torn between coercion and resistance with language itself turning into a conflict zone. The rest of her oeuvre, such as works like the *Exquisite*

Cadavers (Nasrin, 2019) and *The Orders Were to Rape You* (Nasrin, 2021) continue to undermine the traditional formats of literature to reveal how the experience of women is denied, fragmented, or sanitized as part of the hegemonic discourses. Her work reconfigures writing through such formal and thematic interventions as an act of reclamation that opposes the erasing processes of the psyche which it describes. Even though this has drawn increased scholarly attention to *When I Hit You*, critical practices have mostly stayed within feminist and socio-political discourses, emphasizing gendered violence, resistance, and institutional oppression (Kashyap, 2018). The critical response which has been somewhat confined to feminist and socio-political understandings of domestic violence has frequently not been applied to the psychodynamic processes in which domination is internalized and reproduced at the psychic level (Roy, 2020). The research by Abdul Kalam (2021) focuses on the narrative *When I Hit You* more with the perspective of gender inequality and marital violence in the framework of structural and socio-cultural aspects of oppression. Although such analyses play a vital part in the foregrounding of material conditions where they are under-theorized in regard to the intrapsychic processes of repression, dissociation, and affective compliance, through which domination is internalized. The socio-political representation of marital violence, digital surveillance and resistance in *When I Hit You* has been the subject of growing body of feminist scholarship where critical analysis has been largely interested in the vanguard of material and discursive analysis over the intrapsychic mechanisms which constitute female subjectivity.

This paper enters this gap by developing the concept of psychic erasure as a critical framework to study the fusion of outer coercion and inner psychic restructuring. With a qualitative textual and psychodynamic form of analysis, the study prefigures the imposition of patriarchal power, but equally in the unconscious and affective life of the subject, as well as how it is negotiated and at least partially resisted. By doing this, it adds to the feminist literary criticism by integrating the psychoanalytic theory with close reading practices, and in the process providing a more detailed explanation of the processes of female self-making as a dynamic process of fragmentation, negotiation, and resistance in the contemporary literary discourse. The paper fills this gap by suggesting a hybrid feminist-psychodynamic approach of looking at the text as a place of psychic negotiation and not a representation. In this way, it turns the analytical emphasis on the external forms of oppression on their inner impacts and expressions.

This research has a threefold contribution. In theory, it both introduces and develops the concept of psychic erasure as a unique analytical category which describes the intra-psychic aspects of domination. It is methodologically based on the combination of feminist theory with psychodynamic criticism in order to design a more sophisticated interpretative model that can not only reach manifest narrative structures but latent psychic processes. Analytically, it rewrites the story of Kandasamy as an investigation into psychic fragmentation and resistance, and how subjectivity is lost and rebuilt in the process of narration. This research aims to broaden the application of feminist literary criticism with its emphasis on the dynamics of the psyche into a clearer critical perspective in forecasting the interaction between outside pressure and internal self-denial.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINIST PSYCHODYNAMICS AND SUBJECT FORMATION

Psychodynamics is the interplay of unconscious processes and forces of emotion that influence behaviour, especially those which are developed during early development (Opland and Torrico, 2024). Psychodynamic theory is based on the work of Sigmund Freud; however, it has been rewritten over time by feminist scholarship to explore psychic reproduction of gendered oppression (Chodorow, 1978 and Benjamin, 1988). Drew Westen has reaffirmed this ongoing relevance of the Freudian theory by suggesting that most of the fundamental Freudian ideas, including unconscious processes, repression, and affect regulation, have been empirically validated by recent psychological research and hence the long-term scientific and theoretical relevance of Freudian theory (Westen, 1998). As Sherry Hamby (2002) argues, psychodynamic and feminist frameworks should not be treated as mutually exclusive, but as complementary models that together illuminate both the intrapsychic and structural dimensions of violence. Subjectivity of genders is not something that is socially imposed as Nancy Chodorow argues but rather psychologically internalized and reproduced within structures of relationships (Chodorow, 1978). Such a shift allows a change of an individual pathology towards structural and affective analysis of gendered power. In this context, the current paper uses a psychodynamic-feminist perspective to examine the functioning of patriarchal violence, both externally and internally, by restructuring the female psyche. The female subject is not only repressed by the patriarchy, but is psychologically restructured by it, and generates forms of consent, self-surveillance and internal fragmentation. This can be explained using the interconnected idea of internalized patriarchy, affective reproduction and psychic compliance whereby domination is maintained in the process of the subject themselves engaging in emotional and cognitive activities. This is consistent with psychodynamic

research like that of Edward W. McClain (1979) which shows how normative ideological orientations organize intrapsychic variations to organize patterns of compliance, affect regulation and self-perception. Layton's concept of the normative unconscious further shows how the dominant forces become psychically reproduced when social hierarchies settle as unconscious relational expectations rather than overt coercion. He observes, "social norms become unconscious organizers of subjectivity" making domination not just an external imposition but as an internal psychic arrangement. (Layton 2004, 31).

This paper formulates a cohesive feminist psychodynamic approach to examine how psychic erasure works in *When I Hit You*. Instead of viewing psychoanalysis, trauma theory and feminist theory as discrete or parallel methods, the framework brings them together to create a consistent model of analysis that represents subjectivity as meeting point of unconscious processes, relationship patterns and social-cultural conventions. In *When I Hit You*, Meena Kandasamy presumes this psychic restructuring by the gradual internalization of coercive control by the main character. The psychodynamic theory allows one to explore the ways in which external violence is projected into an intrapsychic conflict that manifests itself as identity fragmentation, emotional dissonance and withdrawal. According to Betty Friedan, a crippling of gender roles results in a sense of radical identity crisis, where women find themselves forced to abandon independent subjectivity in the name of domesticity (Friedan, 1963). This crisis is also materialized in the novel since it is the protagonist who is declassified into a regulated identity in marriage, which depicts the affective reproduction of patriarchal norms.

It is structured around the psychic erasure conceptualization as a multi-layered process that functions within three domains, which are interrelated: psychic processes, social mediation, and narrative expression. At the psychic mechanism level, the classical psychoanalytic theory, especially the one of Sigmund Freud (1900, 1923), continues to be central in the determination of the structuring forces of psychic life, i.e. repression, internal conflict, and internalization. Nonetheless, to address the constraints of Freudian universalism, this paper is a revisionist point of view based on the work of Nancy Chodorow (1978), who also reconceptualizes the subject formation as a relationship and socially mediated. With this change, psychic erasure can be interpreted as not an individual pathology but rather as a process conditioned by socialization by gender and the reproduction of affection. It is consistent with this stance taken by Naomi Quinn and Wendy Luttrell, who suggest that psychodynamic processes might manifest some structural regularities but the manifestations of such regularities are necessitated by cultural contexts and, therefore, requires a synthesis between universal psychic mechanisms and culturally specific forms of subject formation (Quinn and Luttrell, 2004). Recent psychoanalytic scholarship on chronic depression expands this understanding by showing how prolonged relational injury may produce not merely episodic trauma but enduring alterations in affect regulation, self-cohesion, and psychic vitality, conditions closely aligned with what this study theorizes as psychic erasure (Leuzinger-Bohleber et al. 2022). Developing this psychodynamic aspect, object-relations theorists like Donald Winnicott (1965) and W. R. D. Fairbairn (1952) also offer some crucial information about the aspects of fragmented identities and the development of the so called 'false self' under the circumstances of relational traumas. In this context, intimate partner violence in *When I Hit You* is not only understood as physical domination but a restructuring of the psyche, in which the inner world of the subject is restructured by the forceful relationships of the process.

Feminist theory provides the necessary means at the level of social mediation to comprehend the ways psychic processes are inscribed in power structures. Judith Butler (1990) reveals that the repetition of regulatory norms constitutes gender identity and thus limit agency and result in an internalized normativity. Psychic erasure in this sense is a process of internalizing the external expectations in the psychic structure of the subject. In the same vein, the arguments of symbolic order brought forth by Julia Kristeva (1982) and Luce Irigaray (1985) help us to realize the structural marginalization of feminine subjectivity in both language and culture where psychic erasure is being placed in a larger context of representation. On the narrative expression level, the theory of trauma is important in the connection of the psychic processes with the literary form. This paper is based on Cathy Caruth (1996) and Judith Herman (1992) by viewing fragmentation, repetition, and narrative discontinuity as not simply a stylistic device but expression of unresolved psychic conflict. Where Cathy Caruth theorizes the trauma as a crisis of representation both in terms of belatedness and fragmentation, Judith Herman contextualizes the trauma within the framework of organized relations of power, especially in relation to long-term interpersonal violence, whereby domination generates the conditions of psychological captivity and fragmented selfhood (Herman, 1992). This differentiation is essential to the current research, since *When I Hit You* preempts the violence of discontinuity of the narrative, but a systematic reorganization of subjectivity in the conditions of coercive relationality. These formal interruptions receive a reading of

psychic erasure as textual inscriptions. Nevertheless, the framework transcends trauma as rupture and includes Paul Ricoeur (1992), who suggests, “to answer the question who... is to tell the story of a life” (Ricoeur 1992, 114), making narration itself a mode of structuring damaged subjectivity where the idea of narrative identity as placing near to storytelling is considered as an ethical and healing form of practice. This enables the analysis to theorize the narrative of Kandasamy as a location of psychic fragmentation as well as a location of partial reconstruction and resistance. Combining these three areas the framework offers a consistent model of analysis according to which psychic erasure can be explained as the result of interplay of processes in the unconscious, gender norms imposed by society, and the process of their narrative expression. This synthesis makes a theoretically-based explanation of the simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of subjectivity in the text possible.

### 3. METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE TEXTUAL AND PSYCHODYNAMIC ANALYSIS

This study will employ a qualitative interpretative research design that is based on close textual analysis and informed by a feminist-psychodynamic paradigm. Instead of seeking empirical generalization, the research favours the analytic depth, theoretical rigor, and interpretative validity, placing the literary text as a critical location of psychic, discursive, and socio-cultural processes intersection (Rabinowitz, 1987 and Felski, 2008). In this regard, this analysis is consistent with poststructuralist methodological practices that do not simply see literature as a form of representation, but as a form of constitutive space of subject formation and affective negotiation.

The methodological importance of *When I Hit You* is that it provides a long-term attention to marital violence, narrative fragmentation, and self-reflexivity authorship, which is specifically well-placed to look at the interconnection between trauma, subjectivity and feminist opposition. Methodology has been laid out in the form of a multi-layered analytical model that is integrated and possesses three interconnected dimensions with the feminist critique serving as the main interpretative dimension and the psychodynamics inquiry serving as the main explanatory framework. This stratified method echoes what Toril Moi (1985) imagines as the need to integrate textual, theoretical and ideological criticism in feminist reading practices. The paper also prefigures the approach of reflexivity as a methodological requirement because interpretation as such is ideologically and culturally positioned. This stance builds upon feminist epistemologies questioning the circumstances of producing knowledge (Haraway, 1988 and Code, 1991), and that the positionality of the critic is bound to influence interpretative results. In that sense, psycho-dynamic feminism highlights the necessity of being mindful of the investments and unconscious predeterminations of the analyst in the interpretative process.

On the plane of textual dynamics, the story shows how psychic obedience can be formed as a result of long-term pressure, which can be emotional manipulation, isolation, and sexual violence. The result of these processes according to object-relations theorists is self-division and affective alienation where the subject is alienated to her desires and agency (Mitchell, 1988 and Benjamin, 1995). Nevertheless, the paper does not take a deterministic utilization of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic models, as feminist critics warn, will tend to homogenize such gendered experience and obscure material conditions (Butler, 1997 and Layton, 2004). This paper, therefore, assumes a heuristic application of psychodynamics, without losing the interpretative quality of psychodynamics but situating it in the socio-material context of gendered violence. The analytic process takes place at three levels that are connected. The initial level is narrative-structural analysis that draws on such formal elements as fragmentation, disjunction of time, repetition, and narrative voice changes. These characteristics are explained based on trauma theory, especially the theory of Cathy Caruth, as not a deviation of style but as formal inscriptions of psychic disruption, thus connecting narrative form and the expression of traumatic experience.

The second tier uses psychodynamic interpretation, which mobilizes such critical notions like the repression, internalization, self-division, and affective withdrawal. Developing the classical Freudian thought and introducing the relational modifications (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983), the stage explores the ways the external patriarchal violence is internalised in the psychic economy of the protagonist. Notably, psychoanalysis is applied, in this case, as an interpretative heuristic and not diagnostic, without reductive or pathologising interpretations. The third level goes a step further to develop feminist critical analysis, placing the psychic processes within a wider context of socio-cultural and ideological structures of gendered power. This phase derives on Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, to explore the influence of normative gender regimes, symbolic exclusion, and discursive regulation to form and limit subjectivity. This guarantees that psychic phenomena are perceived as historical and material mediated events as opposed to intrapsychic events.

It is analyzed in terms of purposely chosen textual fragments, which are selected based on their analysis applicability, as opposed to their representational wholeness (Attridge, 2004). These comprise the scenes of marital coercion, narrative disruption and the self-reflexive articulation. These passages serve as nodal points where the narrative structure and psychic processes meet and allow focusing on the issue of psychic erasure. In this context, psychic erasure is defined as an analysis construct that can be determined by meeting three dimensions: narrative signs (fragmentation, discontinuity, repetition), psychodynamic (repression, internalized power, self-division) and feminist (symbolic exclusion and normative gender regulation) conditions. A text is then read as performing psychic erasure where it exhibits the erosion, suppression or reconfiguration of subjectivity along these intersectional axes.

The study takes the epistemological position of critical-reflexive and non-reductive in its position with respect to text and theory where there is a dialogic relationship between the text and theory (Ricoeur, 1976). The approach to the practice of psychoanalysis is in reaction to the feminist criticism of psychoanalysis that has long been voiced; the approach makes certain that interpretation of the psychic is politically rooted and materialized, not abstracted or depoliticized (Rose, 1986). The methodology allows an analytical process to be conducted in a systematic way by reconciling narrative, psychodynamic, and feminist levels in a coherent analytical model that can explore the writing as a site of psychic erasure and resistance. It therefore transcends the descriptive analysis to a theoretically based explanation of how subjectivity is both destabilized and reconstituted in the process of narrative practice, as part of continuing discussions in feminist literary and psychodynamic criticism.

#### 4. PSYCHIC ERASURE AND MARITAL VIOLENCE

The intricate account of marital violence portrayed in *When I Hit You, or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017) by Meena Kandasamy is a place of psychic breakdown and self-assertion. Being an autobiographical fiction, the text foregrounds the loss of agency in an abusive patriarchal system as it rehearses writing as a counter discursive practice in which the subjectivity is reclaimed in part. The violence portrayed in the novel is not only physical, but also goes into the psychic erasure of identity, whereby identity is destroyed methodically by coercion, surveillance and by imposing silence. The process is reminiscent of the work of F. Vial Aubey, who theorizes psychic erasure as a product of conditions of effroi, an all-consuming affective shock that interferes with the ability to symbolize experience, and results in the fragmentation and partial erasure of memory, identity, and affect (Aubey, 2025). This dynamic is similar to those of Yaliu Yang and Valentina Rojas who show that contexts of coercion and relational control systematically govern the possibility of women speaking, and that such patterns of coercion and disclosure often oscillate in a patterned way (Yang and Rojas, 2025). The psychoanalytic research of persistent depressive disorders indicates that enduring relational coercion can produce types of psychic emptiness characterized by withdrawal, self-dispossession and internalized hopelessness (Ambresin, et al. 2022), which elucidates the depressive aspect of psychic erasure. This state also reminds Freud of his difference between mourning and melancholia in which loss is not consciously processed but absorbed into the ego as self-devaluation and giving rise to varieties of psychic impoverishment similar to psychic erasure (Freud, 1957). On the narrative level, the text breaks with linear realism by being fragmented, time displaced, recursively narrated, the instability of traumatic experience is noted. Cathy Caruth states that trauma is “the story of a wound that cries out” (Caruth 1996, 4) and cannot be directly represented because in most of the cases it corresponds a form of narrative disruption exemplifying the cries of psychic injury. This can be seen in the alternation between the past and the present by the narrator, in which the memory seems to be disjointed and incomplete. These formal disjunctions are not stylistically only, but they are an indication of the disintegration of psychic unity in the face of violence. This fragmentation is reflected in the expression of the narrator, when she says “I feel nauseous. I feel robbed off my identity. I’m no longer myself if another person can so easily claim to be me, pretend to be me and assure my life. While we live under the same roof.” (Kandasamy, 2017, 55). This state is further generalized by the anonymity of the narrator and shifts an individual story into a societal expression of gendered trauma. This formal instability is strongly associated with the psychodynamic state of the protagonist as a result of the internalization of patriarchal violence. Basing on the theory of Sigmund Freud on the conceptualization of repression and internal conflict (Freud, 1960), the story shows how external coercion turns into internal psychic control. The manageability of the husband is further into the realms of language and knowledge as he prohibits writing, secluded her socially, and controls her ideological standpoints, thus transforming her psychic economy. This forced internalization of identity as identity is narrowed down to a role is seen in the narrator herself when she admits that she is nothing but a housewife. The fact that marriage is the ‘re-education camp’ (Mandal, 2021) also reflects the process of the external power turning into the internal obedience.

Sexual violence is acting as a crucial means of psychic domination here. The narrator clearly mentions that “Sex, actually rape, becomes his weapon to tame me. Your cunt will be ruined... you will never be able to offer yourself to any man” (Kandasamy 2017, 168). This articulation shows the way in which the body itself is made a territory of control, supporting what the psychoanalysis would determine as a self-division and withdrawal of affect. This was not violence for a single time but a structural violence as its result was a long-lasting dissonance in which the subject is not only alienated, but also deprived of body and self, a condition widely documented in empirical research linking intimate partner violence to severe psychological and physical health consequences (Ellsberg, et al. 2008). Judith Herman’s influential expression that “the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness” (Herman 1992, 1) helps us see how “psychic erasure” works on two levels. There is the overt coercion where the husband’s control, threats, violence and also dissociation when the narrator’s own mind begins shutting down, splitting off, because that’s the only way to survive it. Nevertheless, writing acts as a counter-psychodynamic act against the violence is also foreshadowed in the story. The narrator claims, that it has become a self-respecting issue to be a writer today. The one word job description is defiance. She narrates,

“Being a writer is now a matter of self-respect. It is the job title that I give myself. But it’s not just about antagonizing him. There is a distasteful air of the outlaw that accompanies the idea of a writer in my husband’s mind. A Self-centredness about writing that doesn’t fit with his image of a revolutionary. It has the one-word job description: defiance. I’ve never felt such a dangerous attraction towards anything else in my life” (Kandasamy 2017, 207).

This re-definition of writing as resistance can be linked to feminist theories of self-representation in which articulation is a way of redefining agency. Self-reflection, as Friedman recommends is at the centre of development of autonomous identity (Friedman 1997). Likewise, in an interview, Kandasamy herself states that writing helps her to cope with trauma. She says, “I think I’m much better writing down what I feel.” (The Guardian 2019). Writing is therefore a form of documentation, resistance and psychic reconstitution.

The experience of the protagonist is thus embedded in normative gender regimes that control subjectivity, as seen through the feminist lens. It is clear how the view of gender as performatively constructed by repetition of norms as introduced by Judith Butler (Butler 1990) manifests itself in the repeated performance of domestic femininity by the narrator. The fact that she is reduced to silence and submission symbolizes the enforcement of the socially acceptable roles which destroy individuality. Simultaneously the notion of symbolic exclusion by Julia Kristeva assists to understand how the female subject is put on the periphery of the discourse (Kristeva 1982), without being fully included in meaning-making formations.

This erasure is reaffirmed by the collusion of both the family and social institutions. In the story itself, the mother of the narrator makes male suspicion normal “Suspicion is the nature of men; is it in the nature of love” (Kandasamy 2017, 56) and the father justifies abuse as a character trait telling that a “good character resides only where anger resides...he means well” (Kandasamy 2017, 159). These reactions are indicative of wider cultural norms that women bear violence so as to maintain family honour. According to Betty Friedan, the feminisation of women causes a sense of psychological discontent and identity crisis (Friedan, 1963). This is also evidenced by the fact that Raj et al. (2021) show that chronic external stressors have a considerable effect on the mental health of women, which supports the cycles of psychological vulnerability. The storyline also reveals the hypocrisies of masculinity of patriarchy. The progressive Marxism ideology of the husband is in stark contrast to his totalitarian domestic situation, which demonstrates what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to as the conflict between the dictated femininity and the repressed revolt and also recalls their argument that the “monster” emerges from repression of prescribed femininity (Gilbert and Gubar 1984, 76), suggesting that the struggle is generated more inside rather than outside. The fact that he tries to control the actions as well as the thoughts of the narrator and her creative expression highlights the degree to which subjectivity itself turns into the space of domination. Nevertheless, under these circumstances, the story is defiant of complete psychic erasure. The asymmetry of power coupled with the recognition of the strategic awareness is reflected in the metaphor of the relationship as a chess game, when the narrator says that although she is the king but is constantly under threat. She says,

“The battle of the adversaries is structured like a chess game. Here, there are only two players, I’m the king, constantly under threat, I’m the king, who can move one step at any given time. He is the drama queen. There is no more that he cannot make. The board is empty except for us” (Kandasamy 2017, 149).

On the other hand, the insistency of the narrator to write- “I remind myself of the fundamental notion of what it means to be a writer. A writer is the one who controls the narrative (Kandasamy 2017, 207) hints at the re-establishment of agency by being an author. This is aligned with the feminist assertions such as the assertion made by Simone de

Beauvoir of social construction of identity, as opposed to innate identity (Beauvoir, 1949) and the possibility of reconstitution through resistance.

Therefore, psychic erasure in *When I Hit You* functions on the overlap of narrative fragmentation, psychodynamic internalization and socio-cultural regulation, and resistance is created by reclaiming narrative voice. The text finally shows that even though the subjectivity can be destabilized in the circumstances of violence, it is not completely killed; instead, it is reorganized in the process of writing which changes the trauma into articulation and agency.

## 5. WRITING, SELF-MAKING, AND PSYCHODYNAMIC RESISTANCE

In *When I Hit You*, Writing becomes not just a narrative feature, but an act of psychodynamic self constitution, whereby the fragmented subject is trying to reclaim agency out of psychic erasure conditions. The text foregrounds the location of writing, as the intersection of unconscious affect, repression, and resistance, as opposed to transparent expression. This articulation of the narrator is representative of the psychoanalytic criticism that has its roots in the work of Sigmund Freud; it is what is perceived as the re-enactment of the repressed, where fragmented and nonlinear articulation is a form of acquiring latent states of emotionality. Fragmentation here serves the dual purpose as it signals trauma and 'depressive semiotics disruption' which further leads to a corroding language and the narrator no longer stitches experience into coherent sentences. Julia Kristeva describes melancholia as producing a speech that is "intermittent, broken, or emptied out" (Kristeva 1989, 33), an expression that resonates with narrative fragmentation as psychic inscription. This relationship is in keeping with feminist redefinitions of psychoanalysis, especially within the work of Elaine Showalter, in which women's writing can be seen as a process of self inscription which cannot be contained by patriarchy. The writing by Meena Kandasamy serves both as psychic release and intervention in politics. The subjected body is reconstituted discursively as a site of control as it is subjected to regulation and violation in marital space. By making the claim, which

"My written body opens up only to the extent I decide to demarcate. It does not require the permission of my parents; it does not require the approval of society. My words might reveal a generous cleavage, a breaking waist, but they do not let anyone put their hands on me... My woman's body, when it is written down, is rape resistant." (Kandasamy 2017, 240)

The above quote leads that textuality allows reconfiguring embodied vulnerability into narrative autonomy. Thus, writing is a counter discursive tactic which breaks down the mechanisms of internalized domination. Simultaneously, the novel does not succumb to any easy romanticization of resistance. The psychodynamic recovery is depicted to be incomplete, volatile and conflictual. The moment when the main character rejects maternity, saying that "I do not want his baby. I cannot bring a baby into a world in which I have no love... I do not want to bring into the world a son who will watch his mother being beaten up" (Kandasamy 2017, 200), is one of the crucial points of rebellion against the fertility ideology of patriarchy. Such rejection is not only ideological but also highly psychodynamic, a rejection of affective patterns that carry on the subjugation. It shows the way the female subject bargains the internalized expectations by misidentifying them consciously and thus breaking the psychic compliance cycle.

Moreover, it is evidenced in the story that writing is a type of controlled free association in which memory, trauma and desire are revealed in a fragmented order. These textual strategies enable the subject to address internal fragmentations, namely repression, dissociation, and self-alienation without necessarily overcoming them. It is in this respect that writing does not rehabilitate a whole self, but, rather, a process of constant psychic negotiation, in which subjectivity is sustained in constant flux. Kristeva argues that melancholia shatters language while the psychic pain becomes so overwhelming that it breaks one's ability to put it in words. It could be related that here writing is not only self expression or therapy for the narrator but its a hard painful labour where she has to rebuild language from the scratch, because violence tried to push her out of it completely (Kristeva 1989, 13-30). Individual experience is also placed in larger constructions of gendered power in the text, reminiscent of feminist criticism, like that of Simone de Beauvoir, who posits woman as a historically constructed category as 'Other'. This condition is shown in the struggle of the narrator who is continually mediated by patriarchal expectations that undermine independent selfhood. The resistance to this forced alterity by writing thus becomes a way of claiming a self that speaks, recalls and tells stories. Notably, even story telling is presented in the novel as an ambivalent process. Although narration provides the chance of catharsis, self-articulation, it also causes the subject to the suffering of re-experiencing trauma. The ethical and affective weight of representation is highlighted by the reluctance of the narrator to represent other people. In this way,

writing is not brought forth as an absolute liberation but is a troubled recursive process that swings both ways concerning empowerment and vulnerability both.

Finally, the psychodynamic model shows that resistance in the text is not only on the surface of the outward rebellion but also on the inside of the restructuring of the psyche. Writing facilitates addressing psychic erasures by allowing the subject to make silence articulate and use fragmentation into a narrative structure. But the change is not a full one and the tension between domination and self-making is illustrated. In the novel, resistance is thus redefined as a continuous psychodynamic process with the act of writing playing a central role in the reconstruction, and not resolution of female subjectivity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In *When I Hit You*, Meena Kandasamy is building a delicate lineage of the formations of the female subject that is both reminiscent of the previous feminist paradigms, but goes further than the linear paradigms, into the recursive and internally fractured process of becoming. The shift in attitude of the narrator between obedience and disobedience and towards precarious self-articulation is not an unchanging teleology of emancipation but a negotiated subjectivity in the face of coercive relationality, and psychic reconfiguration. In this regard, the novel makes the original point of Simone de Beauvoir more complex by showing that a construction of woman as 'Other' took place historically, but also the psychodynamic persistence of this construction in the form of affective habituation, internalized surveillance, and internalization of subordinating norms (Beauvoir, 1949). The critical interventions of Lynne Layton, who postulates that psychic life is heavily entangled with social power, yield forms of "normative unconscious" that maintain domination at the desire and identification level which is a formulation central to the logic of psychic erasure (Layton, 2004). This conflict further mixes with the idea by Butler as well which mentions that resistance does not arise beyond power, but in the ambiguous repetitions of subjection itself (Butler, 1997). The analysis also indicates that patriarchal violence in the text is a two-fold process involving a materialized and a psychically sediment process. Along with psychoanalytic studies on chronic depression, psychic erasure can also be thought of as a depressive formation that is generated through a long-term domination, in which injury does not just act through trauma but also through the erosion of psychic vivacity itself (Leuzinger-Bohleber, et al. 2022). Such duality prefigures what Didier Anzieu theorizes as the skin-ego, where the limits of the self are challenged and restated in relation to traumatic encounters in relationships, and where the result is both a traumatising of the self and a fragmentation both physical and symbolic (Anzieu, 1989). In such circumstances, writing is not just an expressive catharsis but a place of psychodynamic labour, a process by which the This role of writing as a remedial but incomplete activity echoes the concept of Peter Brooks of narrative as a place of organization and reorganization of psychic energies, but not of resolution (Brooks, 1984). Notably, the analysis does not succumb to the celebratory end when it comes to resistance. Rather, it theorizes self-making as contingent, unstable, and always deferred, thus aligning with the formulation of cruel optimism by Lauren Berlant, in which attachments to agency and transformation is itself bound up in conditions, and can be "an obstacle to flourishing" (Berlant 2011, 1), which act to block their actualization, and not to some external form of domination. In addition to the textual realm, the paper places psychic erasure in a wider socio-cultural and institutional framework that legitimizes the subduing of affect and delegitimizes the experiential knowledge of women. These are the circumstances, Veena Das notes, which make both violence ordinary and unarticulated, which makes it part of the textures of everyday life, and as such, difficult to recognize and redress in terms of law, culture, and even epistemology (Das, 2007).

In this regard, modern feminist movements like the one of the #MeToo movement can be interpreted as group counter-discourse that destabilizes the regimes of silence by making personal trauma a subject of public discussion. But, as the very novel warns, the expression of experience does not melt its psychic residues, but instead reforms them in new structures of meaning and appearance. Psychic erasure thus needs to be comprehended as a process systemic and continuous that is generated at the intersection of institutional practices, cultural conventions and intimate relationship.

This research ultimately takes the idea of psychic erasure as a vital point where the domination of the external world and the subject development of the internal world interrelate to provide a theoretically synthesized model that intersects psychodynamics, feminist criticism, and narrative analysis. The paper plays a role in the current discussions of feminist literary and psychoanalytic studies by showing the way in which writing is a space of fragmentation and reconstitution. Future studies can build upon this framework to comparative postcolonial experiences or approach the framework more closely to the questions of affect theory and narrative ethics to further question the intricate negotiations of gendered subjectivity through different cultural constructions.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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