



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <http://www.iasj.net/iasj/journal/356/about>



The Submissive Wife: A Study of Stockholm Syndrome and Abuse-Cycle in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait Of The Writer As A Young Wife*

Maryam Kazim Mohammed Rashed*

University of Tikrit- College of Education for Women- Department of English
maryamkazim708@gmail.com

&

Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed

University of Tikrit- College of Education for Women- Department of English
Lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq.com

Received: 12 / 11 / 2023, Accepted: 7 / 12 / 2023, Online Published: 31/ 1/ 2024

Abstract

Stockholm syndrome refers to a psychological phenomenon observed in situations where individuals, typically hostages or victims, develop a deep bond or compassion for their captors or abusers. Scholars describe Stockholm syndrome as a complex emotional response where victims, despite being held against their will, start feeling positive emotions or sympathy for their captors. This paradoxical phenomenon involves hostages expressing admiration or praise for their captors, seemingly irrational given the danger they face. Victims may form emotional attachments and bonds as survival strategies

* **Corresponding Author** Maryam Kazim, Email maryamkazim708@gmail.com

Affiliation: Tikrit University - Iraq

© This is an open access article under the CC by licenses <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



fostering a connection that contradicts the apparent threat posed by their captors. The main aims of the present study are twofold. The first aim is to examine the depiction of submissive wives in the novel *When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of a Writer as a Young Wife* (2018) written by Meena Kandasamy; and the second, analyzing the wife's submissiveness and acceptance of her spouse's abuse through relating it to Stockholm syndrome and through the lens of abuse cycle theory suggested by Lenore Walker's concept of Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS), which encompasses various psychological and behavioral symptoms. The research argues that the acceptance of violence by abused victims, particularly submissive wives, should not be attributed solely to their actions, as there are numerous underlying reasons, social and psychological, for their submissiveness which will be explored thoroughly in this study.

Key Words: Stockholm syndrome, abuse, emotional bond , Survival strategy, Submissive wife

الزوجة الخاضعة: دراسة لمتلازمة ستوكهولم ودورة سوء المعاملة في رواية مينا كانداسامي عندما أضربك أو، صورة للكاتبة كزوجة شابة

مريم كاظم محمد

جامعة تكريت كلية التربية للبنات

و

ا.د. لمياء احمد رشيد

جامعة تكريت كلية التربية للبنات

المستخلص

متلازمة ستوكهولم إلى ظاهرة نفسية لوحظت في المواقف التي يطور فيها الأفراد، عادة رهائن أو ضحايا، رابطة عميقة أو تعاطفا مع خاطفهم أو المعتدين عليهم. يصف العلماء متلازمة ستوكهولم بأنها استجابة عاطفية معقدة حيث يبدأ الضحايا، على الرغم من احتجازهم ضد إرادتهم، في الشعور بمشاعر إيجابية أو تعاطف مع خاطفهم. تتضمن هذه الظاهرة المتناقضة رهائن يعبرون عن الإعجاب أو الثناء على خاطفهم، ويبدو أنهم غير عقلانيين بالنظر إلى الخطر الذي يواجهونه. قد يشكل الضحايا ارتباطات وروابط عاطفية ك استراتيجيات البقاء على قيد الحياة التي تعزز اتصالا يتناقض مع التهديد الواضح الذي يشكله خاطفهم. الأهداف الرئيسية لهذه الدراسة ذات شقين. الهدف

الأول هو فحص تصوير الزوجات الخاضعات في رواية عندما اضربك: أو صورة لكاتب كزوجة شابة (2018) كتبها مينا كاندامي؛ والثاني، تحليل خضوع الزوجة وقبولها لإساءة معاملة زوجها من خلال ربطها بمتلازمة ستوكهولم ومن خلال عدسة نظرية دورة الإساءة التي اقترحها مفهوم لينور ووكر لمتلازمة المرأة المعنفة ((BWS)، والتي تشمل مختلف الأعراض النفسية والسلوكية. يجادل البحث بأن قبول العنف من قبل الضحايا المعتدى عليهم، وخاصة الزوجات الخاضعات، لا ينبغي أن يعزى فقط إلى أفعالهن، حيث أن هناك العديد من الأسباب الكامنة، الاجتماعية والنفسية، لخضوعهم والتي سيتم استكشافها بدقة في هذه الدراسة.

الكلمات الدالة: متلازمة ستوكهولم، سوء المعاملة، الرابطة العاطفية، استراتيجية البقاء على قيد الحياة، الزوجة الخاضعة.

1.1 Introduction

Abuse, in intimate relationships, is a gravely disturbing and widespread problem that cuts beyond national and geographic boundaries. Literature has frequently been a potent tool for investigation and contemplation in the effort to comprehend the complicated dynamics of abuse and its psychological effects on victims. *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2018) by Meena Kandasamy is one such moving literary work that explores the complexities of abuse and its psychological effects. This study explores the book with a focus on two crucial themes: the cycle of abuse and the occurrence of Stockholm syndrome.

Stockholm syndrome alludes to a mental peculiarity where prisoners foster a profound bond or compassion for their detainers. It got its name from a 1973 incident in Stockholm, Sweden when a criminal named Jan-Erik Olsson held four bank employees captive for six days. During the ordeal, the hostages displayed surprising behaviors, developing a bond with their captors. This incident gave rise to a psychological phenomenon known as Stockholm Syndrome. A term, Stockholm syndrome, as assumed by many scholars, is a psychological phenomenon where people who are held captive or victimized start to feel positive emotions or sympathy toward their captors or abusers. It happens when victims form a bond with their captors based on complicated feelings and

thoughts. This usually occurs only when someone is held against their will. Victims may develop sympathy towards their captors, understand their perspective, and feel negative towards authorities or rescuers. To deal with such a difficult situation, they may also use these emotional attachments and bonding as strategies to survive (Hooper et al., 2014). Thus, it is used to describe a “paradoxical psychological phenomenon wherein hostages express excessive admiration or praise and positive feelings towards their captors (kidnappers/abductors). These appear to be irrational in light of the danger or risk endured by the victims, essentially mistaking a lack of abuse as an act of kindness” (Sonia, 2021, I).

The hostages showed empathy towards their captors, forming a strange connection with them. Over time, the hostages became more afraid of the police than their captors, and they saw compassion in their abductors even when threatened. When the standoff ended, the hostages protected their captors, refusing to leave the vault until they were assured of safety. This display of attachment confused both the public and the authorities (Klein, 2013).

Stockholm syndrome, initially associated with captor-captive dynamics, extends to various relationships, including abusive family scenarios. Dutton (1993) explores battered woman syndrome, delving into the psychological dynamics of victims in abusive relationships. Societal norms and gender roles contribute to victims' decisions to stay, challenging traditional victimhood perceptions. Wallace (2007) applies Stockholm syndrome to domestic violence, emphasizing the emotional bonds between abusers and victims. Abusers employ manipulation, isolation, and threats to control victims, distorting their perceptions and fostering an emotional bond akin to Stockholm syndrome. Cantor and Price (2007) propose an evolutionary perspective, suggesting adaptive functions in extreme threat situations. Victims may develop positive feelings towards captors as a survival strategy. Aziz Ahmad (2018) studied the mediating role of Stockholm syndrome in intimate partner violence, highlighting its impact on psychological distress. Vera George (2015) explores traumatic bonding, emphasizing victims' emotional attachment to abusers due to ongoing trauma. Dee L R Graham (1995) links Stockholm syndrome to intimate partner violence, identifying factors like perceived threat, kindness, isolation,

and the feeling of being unable to escape, creating a comprehensive understanding of its cognitive and perceptual aspects.

In her seminal work, "The Battered Woman" (1979), Lenore E. Walker introduces the concept of Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) as a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and behavioral symptoms experienced by women enduring prolonged and severe domestic violence. BWS incorporates critical elements such as the cycle of violence, which delineates the repetitive pattern in abusive relationships involving tension-building, acute battering episodes, and remorseful or loving periods afterward. Learned helplessness, another component, signifies the psychological state in which battered women perceive a lack of control over their situation, making escaping the abuse seem impossible. Additionally, traumatic bonding, akin to Stockholm syndrome, is described as the emotional attachment victims develop toward their abusers as a survival mechanism (Walker, 1979).

Walker's contributions to the study of Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) have had an enduring influence on the realms of domestic violence research and advocacy. Her insights into the psychological dynamics of abusive relationships have significantly advanced professionals' understanding of battered women's experiences, contributing to the development of more effective interventions and support systems for survivors (Cramer, 2018). Walker also addresses Stockholm syndrome as a step-by-step process for surviving abuse, noting the manipulative strategy of intermittent reinforcement employed by perpetrators. This strategy involves alternating between empathetic and loving behavior and episodes of cruelty, creating a sense of dependence and confusion within the victim (Walker, 1977). Overall, Walker's comprehensive framework of Battered Woman Syndrome sheds light on the psychological impact of domestic violence, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to support and intervention.

Walker (1979) identifies four types of domestic violence: physical abuse involving various violent acts, psychological abuse with legal and non-criminal components, the concept of learned helplessness, and traumatic bonding. Learned helplessness, a crucial aspect of Walker's theory, describes how battered women may give up on escaping abuse and developing coping strategies to minimize harm. Positive psychology can challenge

this by empowering individuals. Walker (1991) suggests that, despite coping mechanisms, women may struggle to leave due to learned helplessness, traced back to negative beliefs about effectiveness and future rewards. This is reinforced by societal expectations of passive, dependent women. Preventative strategies involve promoting positive experiences and strengths, while positive behavioral strategies can help overcome learned helplessness, often requiring external support (Bailey et al.).

The theory of learned helplessness, while controversial, offers empirical support for understanding why some battered women stay in abusive relationships. The focus should be on developing positive parenting strategies to protect women from abuse and promote self-efficacy and self-confidence. Seligman's reformulation of the theory suggests that individuals with a learned helplessness mindset tend to attribute successful experiences to external and specific factors, contributing to the cycle of abuse outlined by Walker (2009). This cycle includes tension-building, severe abuse, and loving repentance, with victims often finding it challenging to end the relationship due to a prior commitment to the abuser and a belief that marriage might change the abuser's behavior. The cycle's first phase involves increasing tension and attempts by the victim to appease the abuser, contributing to a sense of learned helplessness (Walker, 1979, 1994).

In second Phase of an abusive relationship, tension continues to escalate, and the woman, fearing imminent danger, becomes unable to control the abuser's angry responses. Exhausted and stressed, she withdraws, anticipating an explosive outburst from the abuser, who becomes more oppressive in response. The second phase, the acute battering incident, is marked by the uncontrollable release of tension, involving verbal and physical aggression that often leaves the woman severely shaken and injured. Injuries typically occur during this phase, and law enforcement may become involved if called for assistance (Seligman, 1994).

The acute battering phase concludes with a sharp reduction in tension, reinforcing the abuser. Phase three follows, characterized by the abuser's profuse apologies, attempts to assist the victim and demonstrations of kindness and remorse. The abuser may genuinely believe he has changed, and the woman, holding onto hope for his potential transformation, experiences positive reinforcement to remain in the relationship. During

this phase, the abuser's actions often mirror those of the courtship period, reinforcing the woman's decision to stay, even in the absence of observable tension or violence (Gelles,1983).

leaving an abusive relationship is a multifaceted challenge fraught with emotional difficulty and numerous obstacles. Battered women grapple with fear, uncertainty, and the manipulation tactics of their abusers, which include threats, isolation, and intentional economic dependence (Walker, 1979). Psychological factors, such as learned helplessness, play a significant role in trapping women in abusive cycles, reinforcing their belief that leaving is impossible (Walker,1979). The emotional toll experienced by battered women evolves, transitioning from fear and depression to anger and hostility. Economic dependency, limited support networks, and societal norms that stigmatize leaving further compound the complexities of escaping an abusive relationship(Walker, 1977). The interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors underscores the need for comprehensive support systems that address not only the emotional and physical aspects of abuse but also the economic barriers that hinder women from breaking free.

Furthermore, the trauma experienced by battered women extends beyond the immediate physical harm, encompassing psychological wounds akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (Walker, 1991). Battered Woman Syndrome encompasses symptoms like hyper-vigilance, emotional numbness, and various manifestations of trauma that impact memory, sexuality, and overall well-being (Walker, 1994). The cyclical nature of domestic violence complicates the healing process, hindering recovery as new wounds are inflicted before previous ones can fully heal. Walker's insights into the psychological dynamics of abusive relationships emphasize the importance of recognizing the external pressures and constraints that battered women face (Walker, 1977). A comprehensive understanding of these factors is essential for developing effective support systems and interventions that address not only individual experiences but also the broader social and cultural dynamics that perpetuate abuse and hinder women from seeking assistance.

1.2 The Wife's Submissiveness in the Scope of Stockholm Syndrome and Abuse Cycle in *When I Hit You Or, A Portrait Of The Writer As A Young Wife*

Meena Kandasamy, a renowned Indian poet and novelist born in 1984, has not only contributed significantly to literature but also shared a poignant personal journey of escaping an abusive marriage. Her acclaimed work, *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), not only portrays her ordeal but explores the psychological complexities of abusive relationships. Addressing themes like the cycle of abuse and Stockholm syndrome, Kandasamy sheds light on the pervasive cultural acceptance of domestic violence in Indian society. The novel has gained international acclaim for its candid narrative, raising awareness about spousal abuse (Self, 2019).

When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife portrays the story of a young woman who is a poet, writer, and feminist who falls in love with a communist and revolutionary. After they marry, he takes her to Mangalore, far away from her family and friends. He begins to assert control over her by asking her to change her mobile number and monitoring her digital communication. He isolates her from the outside world and begins to physically and emotionally abuse her. She eventually finds the strength to leave him and start a new life. She begins to write about her experiences, to help other women who are trapped in abusive relationships which can represent the Stockholm syndrome phenomenon.

The novel tackles the complex and terrible ramifications of an abusive relationship. The protagonist, an unidentified writer, falls in love with a university professor and moves to a small village with him. But the connection quickly turns violent, and the writer becomes locked in an abusive cycle. The work looks into the psychological components of abuse, such as the cycle of abuse, in which the abuser alternates between being loved and caring and being aggressive and abusive. The protagonist continually wishes for the restoration of the loving phase and blames herself for the abusive phase (Norris, 2017).

Kandasamy paints a vivid picture of the abuse cycle that many victims of domestic violence face. Her novel shows how this pattern can imprison victims in a never-ending cycle of violence, manipulation, and deception. She demonstrates how abusers frequently shift between acts of aggression and guilt, giving their victims a sense of unpredictability and instability. Her vivid description of the abuse cycle emphasizes the devastation that

domestic violence can inflict on its victims. She underlines how difficult it may be to break free from the pattern, and how victims are frequently locked in a loop of optimism and despair. She stresses this fact, saying that "the violence was not always there. It came in waves, like an approaching storm, and sometimes I could feel it gathering strength from miles away" (Kandasamy, 2018, p. 5). This thought illustrates how the abuser's behavior can be unpredictable, and how victims can feel a sense of impending doom as they anticipate the next outburst. Her depiction of the abuse cycle is a powerful commentary on the insidious nature of domestic violence. Paul Sehgal writes in *The New York Times* that "Kandasamy depicts the insidiousness of abuse: the way it bends and distorts language, until words themselves become a weapon of control and violence" (2018, 1).

In *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, Meena Kandasamy adeptly portrays the insidious stages of the abuse cycle, unraveling the complexities of domestic violence. Through vivid storytelling, she illustrates how abuse can start subtly, escalate into brutality, and then cycle through phases of remorse and temporary calm before resuming. Kandasamy emphasizes the protagonist's internal conflict during the tranquil periods, torn between hope for change and the inevitable return of abuse. Her graphic depiction of the cycle exposes the harsh realities of domestic violence and underscores the importance of reporting abuse and seeking help (Bancroft, 2002).

The acceptance of abuse can be attributed to several factors, including the protagonist's initial feelings of love and admiration for her husband, her desire to make the marriage work, her fear of being alone, her belief that she can change her husband's behavior, and her belief that the abuse is her fault. Furthermore, societal and cultural issues like guilt, stigma, and the pressure to appear joyful (Sharma, 2017).

The reason for the protagonist's acceptance of her husband's violence is her "love for her husband," and "her deep-seated feelings of shame, remorse, and helplessness" all contribute to her acceptance of the abuse (Sharma, 2017, p.3). Furthermore, the protagonist's history as a writer, as well as her ambition to create a literary work based on her experiences, play a factor in her decision to stay with her spouse and bear the abuse

(Sharma, 2017). The main character's devotion to her husband is clear from beginning to end. Even after he starts abusing her, she explains her feelings for him as follows:

Oh no. I love him the way one loves a leader. My love for him is no different than your love for him, cheat.' Such a repartee does not change anyone's opinion. It only makes it easier for me to put on a brave, indifferent face. To these purpose-hunters of love, no answer will ever be good enough. (Kandasamy, 2017, p.72)

The decision of the protagonist to remain with her violent partner is also heavily influenced by her feelings of humiliation and helplessness. Because of societal norms and her desire to avoid looking like a failure, she feels unable to leave him: "I had been brought up to believe that marriage was the ultimate goal for a woman... I felt like a failure, like I had let everyone down" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 66). This quotation shows that the protagonist has been raised to think that getting married is the pinnacle of female success. As a result, she feels as though she has failed to live up to her family's and society's expectations whenever there is violence in her marriage. According to the protagonist's comment, she has likely internalized societal and cultural expectations of marriage and femininity, which adds to her sense of failure and humiliation (Sharma, 2017).

Another reason the protagonist chose to remain with her husband was her desire to write about her experiences. She says "I needed to write about what had happened to me... I wanted to create something beautiful out of the ugliness that I had encountered ". She also asserts that "I wanted to create something beautiful out of the ugliness that I had experienced (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 92). She thinks that by writing about the assault she suffered, she will raise awareness of the problem and assist other women who are in equivalent circumstances. Overall, the protagonist's acceptance of her husband's physical aggression is complicated and impacted by a variety of personal, societal, and cultural circumstances.

The abuser in the story employs a variety of techniques to control his victim, including gaslighting, which involves manipulating her view of reality to make her doubt herself, and seclusion, which involves isolating her from her friends and family. He

retains power and influence over her through these measures, making it impossible for her to quit the relationship. The novel also looks at societal expectations surrounding marriage and relationships, notably in India, where the story takes place (Sarkar, 2019, p.53). The protagonist says "The problem with gaslighting is that you don't realize you are being duped until it is too late. Something is wrong, but you can't quite pinpoint what it is "(Kandasamy, 2017, 79). This comment demonstrates how the novel's abuser employs gaslighting to influence the protagonist and make her doubt her view of reality.

In *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, Meena Kandasamy adeptly portrays the insidious stages of the abuse cycle, unraveling the complexities of domestic violence. Through vivid storytelling, she illustrates how abuse can start subtly, escalate into brutality, and then cycle through phases of remorse and temporary calm before resuming. Kandasamy emphasizes the protagonist's internal conflict during the tranquil periods, torn between hope for change and the inevitable return of abuse. Her graphic depiction of the cycle exposes the harsh realities of domestic violence and underscores the importance of reporting abuse and seeking help (Bancroft, 2002).

The physical violence endured by the protagonist is powerfully captured by Kandasamy, revealing the profound impact on her physical and mental well-being. Descriptions of relentless beatings and their aftermath, such as being black and blue and curled on the floor in agony, evoke a visceral understanding of the brutality. Kandasamy's narrative serves as a poignant commentary on the urgent need for effective interventions to address domestic abuse. Furthermore, scholars like Kesarwani (2023) and Alapati et al. (2022) emphasize the broader societal implications, linking the protagonist's abuse to deeply ingrained issues of gender inequality, stereotypes, and cultural norms.

The pressure from her family and society makes her continue in such a toxic marriage as hers, even though it is very abusive. She reveals how the abuser isolates her from her family and friends and family, "I didn't have a phone, internet, or any other means of communication. I was alone in this small town, with no friends or relatives to turn to "(Kandasamy, 2017, 79). This quotation demonstrates how seclusion is utilized as a form of control, making it harder for the protagonist to leave the relationship; the abuser uses seclusion and restricts the protagonist's access to the outside world, resulting in a

situation in which the abuser is the only source of knowledge and control. In this sense, Sarkar states that "By solitude and cutting off her communication with others, the abuser creates for his victim a reality that is fully controlled by him "(Sarkar, 2019, p. 59). Gaslighting is used to alter the protagonist's perspective of reality. The protagonist is continuously made to feel that her observations and thoughts are not only erroneous but ludicrous," she writes. This remark emphasizes how the abuser employs seclusion and gaslighting, which is one of the techniques that the husband uses to make the heroine question her reality, to manipulate and maintain power over her (Hightower, 2017).

Kandasamy uses the narrator's voice to provide a dramatic and frank representation of the impact of domestic abuse on the lives of survivors, including the psychological strain and the difficulties of leaving an abusive partner. The novel is a compelling and thought-provoking investigation of an important problem, and it has received widespread appreciation for its honesty and dedication to promoting awareness about family violence (Martin, 2018). Here is an excerpt from the novel that exemplifies the psychological toll of domestic abuse on the survivor:

But as the days went on, I found myself getting used to it. The constant surveillance, the sudden outbursts, the emotional blackmail. I told myself it was just a phase, and that things would get better. I tried to convince myself that I was strong enough to handle it. But the truth is, I was scared. Scared of what he might do, scared of what might happen if I tried to leave. Scared of being alone. (Kandasamy, 2017, p.31)

This phrase emphasizes the psychological toll that family violence can have on a person, as the survivor attempts to accept the reality of their position and live with the anxiety and uncertainty that it entails. The paragraph also touches on the difficulty of departing from a controlling partner, another issue explored by Kandasamy throughout the work.

Sexual abuse, a pervasive form of control, leaves both physical and psychological scars on victims. Throughout the novel, the protagonist endures repeated sexual assaults, vividly portrayed as tools of control and subterfuge. One harrowing instance involves the threat of death if she resists the husband's rape, showcasing the explicit and terrifying

nature of the sexual assault. These events emphasize the protagonist's profound trauma and violation, underscoring the emotional, psychic, and physical harm inflicted. The husband's use of sexual violence not only serves as a means of asserting dominance but also leaves the protagonist deeply wounded and powerless, intensifying the psychological impact of the assaults due to her perceived lack of agency in resisting or escaping the abuse (Kandasamy, 2017).

He would climb on top of me and expect me to lie there still and quiet, and let him have his way with me. I would not open my mouth to scream or protest, but he did not like that either. He would take that as a sign of my consent and pleasure, and then he would start talking filthy (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 65).

This passage vividly portrays the protagonist's helplessness and humiliation in the face of her husband's sexual assault, emphasizing the lasting impact of enforced silence on her physical and psychological well-being. *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, powerfully illustrates the profound consequences of sexual violence, emphasizing the urgency of intervention and support for survivors.

The novel also addresses emotional abuse, particularly gaslighting, which significantly harms the protagonist's mental health. Gaslighting manipulates the victim's perception of reality, fostering confusion and self-doubt. The protagonist's husband employs gaslighting to isolate and control her, as seen when he denies a hurtful remark, contributing to her confusion and self-doubt (Kandasamy, 2017).

Hence, Gaslighting can have major mental health effects for the sufferer. It can cause anxiety, despair, and other psychological disorders in addition to perplexity and self-doubt. Gaslighting contributes to the protagonist's sense of powerlessness and despair. It also emphasizes the pervasiveness of emotional abuse and how abusers might utilize psychological strategies to maintain control over their victims. Throughout the narrative, the husband contradicts himself, denies what he said or did, and blames the protagonist for his errors. When the protagonist confronts him about a harsh remark he made:

He denied everything, of course. Every remark he had ever made, every promise he had ever broken. He said I was making it all up, or that I must have dreamt it. It was as though I was losing my grip on reality, as though I was the one with the problem. And maybe I was, in a way. Maybe it was my fault for not seeing what was happening, for not leaving sooner, for not being strong enough to stand up to him. That's what he wanted me to believe, at least" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 91).

This comment reflects how the husband defies his own words and actions, isolating and perplexing the protagonist while cementing the husband's authority over her. It also demonstrates how, as a result of the husband's behavior, the protagonist begins to question her reality, which is a frequent method employed by abusers to keep control over their victims.

Emotional blackmail is a type of emotional abuse in which the abuser controls the victim's conduct by threats or enforcement. The narrator's spouse routinely uses emotional blackmail to force her to agree with his demands. He informs her saying, "If you do not obey me, I will kill myself" (Kandasamy, 2017, 86). This approach is a classic type of emotional abuse since it puts the victim under pressure to comply with the abuser's requests since they fear for the abuser's safety:

He said he would kill himself if I left him. He said it was the only thing that would make him happy. And I believed him. I believed that he would do it, that he would find a way to end his life if I did not stay with him. It was a terrible burden to bear, knowing that I was the only thing standing between him and oblivion. It was a kind of emotional blackmail, I suppose, but I didn't know that at the time (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 86).

This quote demonstrates that emotional blackmail may be immensely harmful to the victim's mental health by instilling feelings of shame, fear, and helplessness (Kandasamy, 2017). Accordingly, emotional blackmail is a typical method employed by abusers to abuse and dominate their victims through threats, guilt, or manipulation. Making the

victim feel responsible for the abuser's feelings or behavior is a common tactic used in emotional blackmail.

In the tension-building phase of, *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, the protagonist's husband becomes increasingly controlling and aggressive, starting with seemingly innocuous behavior like obsessively flicking TV channels but escalating to overt control and verbal aggression. The protagonist feels like she's walking on eggshells, uncertain about what might trigger his anger (Kandasamy, 2017). This phase is depicted as a gradual accumulation of stress, eroding the protagonist's sense of safety (Gillette, 2022).

Cognitive violence is explored as the husband manipulates the protagonist's thoughts and emotions, a central theme in the novel. Using gaslighting, he distorts her reality, convincing her she has no friends and is perceived as insane, leading to self-doubt and loneliness (Kandasamy, 2017). Gaslighting is a recurring method used for control in the story.

Physical violence is a pervasive form of abuse experienced by the protagonist. The narrative details instances of severe physical assault, complemented by emotional and psychological abuse. The protagonist vividly recalls being attacked with clenched fists, highlighting the alarming physical violence she endures, she says: "You don't have any friends here. Nobody wants to speak with you. Everyone believes you are insane" (Kandasamy, 2017, 86). This depiction challenges India's culture of silence on domestic abuse, as described by Sarkar (2019).

Kandasamy's novel, *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, challenges societal norms enabling domestic abuse, illustrating the protagonist's struggles to escape her abusive husband amid cultural constraints. The first-person narrative enhances reader connection, revealing the psychological toll of domestic violence (Sarkar, 2018). While not explicitly mentioning Stockholm syndrome, the novel explores emotional dynamics, depicting the protagonist's survival strategy of feigning happiness despite abuse (Shaik, 2021).

The story highlights gender bias, portraying societal attitudes where husbands exercise sexual superiority, subjecting the protagonist to dehumanizing treatment (Kashyap, 2018). Digital control's dangers are exposed, emphasizing the husband's manipulation of the protagonist's digital communication for isolation (Mamgain & Khan, 2021). The narrative unveils the wife's vulnerability to online crimes due to her husband's control over her passwords.

The protagonist's struggle for connection through Facebook and the husband's threat to harm himself if she doesn't deactivate her account intensify her isolation and vulnerability. The husband's strict control over the wife's internet usage and imposition of traditional gender roles characterize an oppressive environment akin to that faced by battered women (Mamgain & Khan, 2021). The husband's brutal behavior, restricting the wife's freedom in various aspects, mirrors the experiences of trapped and battered women, reinforcing the novel's portrayal of an oppressive environment (Kate Millet, as cited in Mamgain & Khan, 2021). The protagonist's conflicting emotions and survival instinct underscore the complex and harrowing reality faced by victims of domestic abuse.

Despite the abuse and manipulation, she has endured from her husband, she may still have conflicting emotions and a deep attachment to him due to the psychological trauma and conditioning she has experienced. This inner conflict reflects the complex nature of Stockholm syndrome, where victims often struggle with conflicting emotions and find it challenging to break free from their abusive relationships (Kashyap, 2018), Kandasamy presents that in these lines:

I am the woman who was a battered wife. I am the same wife who ran away. "I am the woman whose parentage is not probed. I am the woman who does not provide evidence of lineage, the one who does not have to sketch my family tree with its mangled roots, with its share of concubines and kept women, with its incorrigible branches of bastardized children". (Kandasamy, 2020, p. 245 – 246)

Here, the wife is feeling worried; she believes that society will not accept her and will diminish her value as a woman, leading to feelings of anxiety. Additionally, not having a child adds to her shame due to societal stigma. Society's judgment and the fear of being labeled negatively affect her self-esteem. She feels judged for starting a new relationship after leaving her ex-husband, thinking society will view her as someone who goes from one man to another (Kashyap, 2018), she says:

I am the woman who will be cursed by society for being passed from man to man to man, hand to hand to hand. I am the woman at whom society cannot spit or throw stones because this me is a she who is made up only of words on a page, and the lines she speaks are those that everyone hears in their voice (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 245 – 246)

In these lines, she feels judged for starting a new relationship after leaving her ex-husband, thinking society will view her as someone who goes from one man to another. The wife feels unworthy and believes she has lost her reputation, particularly as a widow. She indicates that becoming a widow greatly affects her life, making her feel like she has lost her confidence, self-worth, and value.

The wife is constantly worried about what might happen to her, and she is afraid that she is going to die. "Every day, I inch closer to death, to dying, to being killed, to the fear that I will end up in a fight whose result I cannot reverse " (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 155). This is a very real and justified fear, and it is causing her a great deal of distress. This fear can be connected to Stockholm syndrome. Its bond can be characterized by feelings of trust, sympathy, and even love. In this wife's case, she is not being held captive, but she is being abused by her husband. She frequently experiences realistic anxiety, feeling terrified and horrified by her husband's actions. Being a punching bag for her husband fills her with fear, and she believes that the longer she stays in the relationship, the closer she gets to death. The wife's lack of power and inability to defend herself against her husband's abuse causes her significant stress. This realization of being trapped in an abusive relationship intensifies her anxiety as she sees no means of escape (Sehgal, 2018).

In summary, the wife's encounters with realistic anxiety stem from the constant fear and terror inflicted by her husband. She wrestles with her powerlessness and the realization that escape seems impossible. *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, explores how a woman can survive and confront an oppressive man. The protagonist, feeling isolated and unable to communicate, imagines herself as an actress and writer to escape her abusive life. She writes letters to imaginary lovers, expressing her toxic emotions. Despite the mistreatment, she cleverly plans her escape and uses writing as a form of artistic expression and empowerment. This resilience and transformation connect to the concept of Stockholm syndrome, where the protagonist finds strength through creativity and coping mechanisms.

Conclusions

Abuse is a widespread problem that harms people in different ways, involving physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and financial mistreatment. Stockholm syndrome is a puzzling response where abused individuals develop feelings of empathy or loyalty towards their abusers. This research aims to understand the complexities of abused wives' behavior and the impact of abusive relationships on their mental well-being. The novel *'When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, by Meena Kandasamy explores abuse cycles and Stockholm syndrome, shedding light on women's lives in the modern world influenced by new lifestyles and social media.

The novel delves into the challenge's women face in abusive situations, portraying how power and control trap them in ongoing suffering. The vulnerability of the protagonists exposes them to physical, emotional, and psychological torment. The digital age introduces new forms of violence against women, using technology to exert dominance and humiliation. The novel also highlights Stockholm syndrome, where victims paradoxically develop empathy and loyalty toward their abusers, challenging traditional notions of victimhood. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of a Writer as a Young Wife* novel skillfully captures the protagonist's gradual loss of agency and the suffocating effects of her abusive marriage, offering a poignant portrayal of the psychological aspects of Stockholm syndrome. The protagonist's internal struggle, navigating emotions of fear, dependence, and an inexplicable attachment to her abuser,

serves as a profound representation of this complex psychological phenomenon. Furthermore, the incorporation of new lifestyles and social media into the story reflects the evolving societal influences that impact the characters' experiences.

References

- Ahmad, A., Aziz, M., Anjum, G., & Mir, F. V. (2018). *Intimate partner violence and psychological distress: Mediating role of Stockholm syndrome*. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 33(2), 541557.
- Alapati, P. R., Mantri, V. R. R., Kalpana Devi, G., Subba Rao, V. V., Venkatadri, V., & (2022). Submission to Subversion: An Analytical Study of Meena Kandasamy's 'When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife'. *Journal Title*, Volume(Issue), Page numbers (VOL. 12 NO. 11) DOI: <https://doi.org/>
- Bailey, R., Dugard, J., Smith, S. F., & Porges, S. W. (2023). Appeasement: replacing Stockholm syndrome as a definition of a survival strategy. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 14(1), 2161038.
- Bancroft, L. (2002). *Why does he do that? Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*. Berkley Books.
- Dutton, D. G., & Painter, S. (1993). *Emotional attachments in abusive relationships: A test of traumatic bonding theory*. *Violence and victims*, 8(2), 105.
- Cantor, C., & Price, J. (2007). *Traumatic entrapment, appeasement and complex post-traumatic stress disorder: evolutionary perspectives of hostage reactions, domestic abuse, and the Stockholm syndrome*. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 41(5), 377-384.
- Chakraborty, A. (2008). *Venomous touch: Meena Kandasamy and the Dalit resistance*. *Postcolonial Text*, 4(4), 3. *poetics of*
- Gillette, Hope. (2022). "The 4 Stages of the Cycle of Abuse: From Tension to Calm and Back. Medically". *Psychology*. 15 July. *Tension*
- Cramer, E. P. (2018). *Battered Woman Syndrome*. In R. T. R. Dodge (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Criminal Psychology*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gelles, R.A., & Straus, M.A. (1988). *Intimate violence*. New York: Touchstone.

- George, V. (2015). Traumatic bonding and intimate partner violence.
- Graham, D. L., Rawlings, E. I., Ihms, K., Latimer, D., Foliano, J., Thompson, A., ... & Hacker, R. (1995). *A scale for identifying "Stockholm syndrome" reactions in young dating women: Factor structure, reliability, and validity. Violence and victims, 10(1), 3.*
- Hightower, E. (2017). *An exploratory study of personality factors related to psychological abuse and gaslighting* (Doctoral dissertation, William James College).
- Hooper, L. M. & Jankowski, P. J. (2014). Stockholm Syndrome. *Models of Psychopathology: Generational Processes and Relational Roles, 99-115.*
- Kandasamy, M. (2018). *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait Of The Writer As A Young Wife*. Atlantic Books.
- Kashyap, D. T. (2018). Feminist Study in Meena Kandasamy's Novels' *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife and The Gypsy Goddess*. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature. (RJELAL)'6, 3.*
- Kesarwani, R. (2023). The voice of protest: Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. Unpublished manuscript. Government Girls' P.G. College, Ghazipur, U.P.
- Klein, C. (2013). *The Birth of "Stockholm Syndrome," 40 Years Ago. Birth.*
- Mamgain, K., & Khan, N. (2021). Digital Abuse in 'When I Hit You by Meena Kandasamy. *European Journal of Natural and Social Sciences- Novus, 1(01), 010001EJNSS.*
- Martin, R. (2018, September 28). The Real-Life Horrors Behind 'When I Hit You'. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/28/652173756/the-real-life-horrors-behind-when-i-hit-you>
- Norris, S. (2017, August). *When I Hit You: An Interview with Meena Kandasamy*. Mslexia. URL:[<https://mslexia.co.uk/when-i-hit-you-interview-meena-kandasamy>].
- Sarkar, S. (2020). *Understanding the nuances of gaslighting in intimate partner violence*. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine, 42(5), 467-471.* https://doi.org/10.4103/IJPSYM.IJPSYM_319_20
- Sehgal, P. (2018, June 21). "How a Novel About a Young Writer's Marriage Became a Literary Sensation". *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/books/review/meena-kandasamy-when-i-hit-you.html>.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (1975). *Helplessness: on depression, development, and death*. San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman.

- Self, J (25 Nov,2019) *Interview Meena Kandasamy: 'If I was going to write my life story, I would condense that marriage to a footnote'*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/nov/25/meena-kandasamy-interview-exquisite-cadavers>.
- Shaik, F. (2021). Self-identity of women in the select novels of Anees Jung.
- Sharma, R. (2017, May 18). 'When I Hit You' Is a Devastating Account of Marital Violence and a Writer's Right to Choose Her Story. The Wire. Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/books/when-i-hit-you-meena-kandasamy-marital-violence>.
- Walker, L. E. (1977). *Who are the battered women? Frontiers: A journal of women studies*, 52-57.
- , L. E. A. (1979). *The battered woman*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- , L.E.A. (1991). *Abused women, infants, and substance abuse: Psychological consequences of failure to protect*. In P.R. McGrab & D.M. Doherty (Eds.), *Mothers, infants, and substance abuse: Proceedings of the APA Division 12, Midwinter Meeting*, Scottsdale, AZ, January 19–20.
- , L. E. (2009). *Abused Women and Survivor Therapy Practical Guide for the Psychotherapist*. American Psychological Association.
- Wallace, P. (2007). *How can she still love him? Domestic violence and the Stockholm syndrome*. *Community Practitioner*, 80(10), 32-35.