

## Power Game: Gender Inequality in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

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### ABSTRACT

This research article examines various aspects such as themes, the craftsmanship of Buchi Emecheta, and Meena Kandasamy to establish the nature of feminism in their works. This article attempts to explore certain unexplored arena of gender inequality to establish feminist credentials even more firmly. Protagonists in Emecheta's *Second-class citizen* and Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* are not submissive to exploitation but active to revolutionize their situations. Research article explores societal structures of African and Indian culture, investigate whether in prevailing cultures both gender are attaining equality or not and if certain gender is being oppressed what is the reason behind it. This paper identifies how domestic violence, traditions, family life and complacency as being accountable for unequal distribution of power among the genders and how it forms the basis of exploitation of women. Both Emecheta's and Kandasamy's approach to destabilize male oppression with them confirms that despite the thrash about, women proclaim themselves in a realm is subjugated by men through education and female solidarity and their novel suggests a social alteration by which the different forms of exclusion, domination, mistreatment, physical and emotional abuse and their silencing that encourage gender inequality can be confronted by women itself. The article is also expected to analyse and assess the African Indian society with special reference to the condition of women therein and Gender Inequality prevailing.

### Keywords

Gender Inequality, Sexual Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Submissive, Power-Game.

### Introduction

Suffering can be classified as bodily, psychological or emotional. "It may come in all degrees of intensity, from mild to intolerable." (Lickiss & Norelle, 2012) Any nasty feeling, sensation and emotion, can be regarded a suffering. Whereas suffering can be of two type physical or psychological pain, Samina Raza explains difference between physical and psychological pain "When we feel physical pain, we have no qualms about going to a doctor and getting it looked at and treated. Psychological pain is more nebulous. Not only do other people have trouble believing that you are suffering, but you yourself doubt there's really anything wrong." (Raza, 2020) In society and culture Men hold authoritative positions in family and society as well. Men are deemed as superiors who hold elevated status as the head of the house whereas women are submissive as their position are kept lower and from very beginning, they are taught to obey men in order to make them feel that they are faithful to them. Any resistance or disobey is taken as threat to their regime. "Sexual violence is

a profoundly negative and traumatic life event with widespread psychological and sociological effects on the victim irrespective of their gender. It often gives rise to a wide range of negative emotions, embarrassment, and existential questions such as 'Why me?' It increases feelings of helplessness and powerlessness in the victim affecting their self-esteem and producing feelings which suggest that they may be vulnerable to further violence. It is likely that the fear of sexual violence in women will restrict their freedom and occupational opportunities and affect their long-term psychological well-being." (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013)

### Submissiveness: Part of Repression

Male supremacy is very ubiquitous in Indian and African society. When discussing Gender issues Patriarchy, is very important aspect. Pilcher and Whelehan say that "Patriarchy literally means rule by the male head of a social unit (a family or tribe). It also refers to the elder who has power over others in the social unit including other men, women, and children.

Feminists have used the term to refer to the social system of male domination over women.” (Pilcher & Wheelahan, 2004) Thus, protagonists in select novels also undergo a struggle to find their real selves; because of the cramping pressures of anxieties, they seem to have lost it. In her marriage, Adah had little expectations from her husband regarding love, faithfulness, and companionship which I not expected thing in marriage. In prevailing patriarchal culture, Adah does not have the right to decide the family matters even though she earns much more money than her husband. In such a case, Adah feels displeasure regarding Francis’ submitting the dictates of the patriarchal culture as: “...most of the decisions about their own lives had to be referred first to Big Pa, Francis’ father, then to his mother, then discussed amongst the brothers of

the family before Adah was mentioned.” (Emecheta, 1974)

Cultural factors cannot be side-lined when dealing with gender issues because these cultural practices have for a long period been regarded as major contributors to gender inequality globally. Similarly, Kandasamy personified the very condition of women, where she cannot speak about what she is going through, she feels ashamed and feels she would be questioned about her patience in dealing with her marriage “In the eyes of the world, a woman who runs away from death is more dignified than a woman who runs away from her man. In place of a firing party, I outstare the barrels of endless interrogation... Sometimes the shame is not the beatings, not the rape. The shame is being asked to stand to judgment.” (Kandasamy, When I Hit You, 2017)

### Analysis of Unheard Voices

Although other African female writers like Flora Nwapa, Adichie, Mariama Ba, etc., have explored the gender issues, Emecheta has a distinctive opinion and sense which is shown through her works, portraying human oppression and exploitation sequestered to sexuality and gender. Emecheta’s novel delves into numerous situations through which women are persecuted. Emecheta wants to draw attention to the fact that right from childhood the mindset of girls’ is molded such that their childhood experiences convinced them of having a low opinion about themselves with respect to another gender. Adah’s experiences formed a very low opinion about her own sex as she was mistreated and subjugated. After Adah’s father died, she was sent to her maternal uncle’s house where she was treated servant during her childhood. “The longer she stayed at college, the larger the dowry her future husband would buy her.” (Emecheta, 1974)

Similarly, Meena Kandasamy’s unnamed narrator is suffocated in her marriage, wants to come out of it, what really stops her is disgrace that her failed marriage is going to bring to her and her entire family. “If you break off your marriage, everyone in a town will mock me, moans your father over the phone when told by his daughter that her husband rapes her and beats her with belts, electrical cables, and power cords

of her laptop and that he controls her contact with the outside world, to which the narrator’s father responds with the self-involved disgruntlement of an Indian patriarch.” (Faleiro, 2020) unnamed narrator is put under pressure by parents to deal with situation submissively “A father of a daughter that is a special kind of punishment, we pay the price.” (Kandasamy, 2017)

Every father must go through this dilemma when he had to choose between her daughter and reputation of his family, because any harsh step taken by daughter in her marriage would become direct threat to prestige of family. A woman strangled in a bad marriage feels guilty to speak her heart to her loved ones, thought which hinders her is being judged and sentenced her for defaming the family prestige, Kandasamy’s unnamed narrator speaks about her ill marriage and response is as expected “A father of a daughter that is a special kind of punishment, we pay the price.” (Kandasamy, 2017)

Women are regarded second-class human beings and expected to be submissive to their husbands; they are bought like properties and treated like slave. Adah had no role in decision making neither in family matter nor in matter related to her. “...most of the decisions about their lives had to be referred first to Big Pa, Francis’ father, then to his mother, and then discussed amongst the brothers of the family before Adah was referred to.” (Emecheta, 1974) Explaining

chronicles of Meena Kandasamy through the unnamed narrator of *When I Hit You*, an outspoken leftist and poet. Kandasamy delves into the issues of the plight of woman who is constantly retold that 'she is nothing' woman, just a flesh with no self-respect, she is muted against the violence, abuse, and she has no right to stand up against defilement of her fundamental rights. "In the eyes of the planet, a lady who runs far away from death is more dignified than a lady who runs far away from her man." (Kandasamy, 2017)

### Gender Stereotypes in Culture

Gender stereotypes play a vital role in inequality among the genders. "Organized sets of beliefs about the characteristics of all members of a particular group are stereotypes. A set of belief about what it means to be a male, or a female is a gender stereotype. Gender stereotypes include information about physical appearance, attitudes and interests, psychological traits, social relations and occupations." (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Wehlers, 1986) "Most important, these various dimensions are interrelated simply knowing that an individual is female implies that person will have certain physical characteristics (soft voice, dainty, graceful) and certain 20 psychological traits (nurturing, dependent, weak, emotional) and will engage in particular kind of activities (child care, cooking, gardening)." (Deaux & Lewis, 1984)

It is essential to learn that stereotypes can exist only in a social context rather than private sense. Males and females are, not that different as they think they are. Confidence is one the factor which has close relation with upbringing of gender, and it is also closely related to a sense of control, which develops differently for male and female. Male eventually have more opportunities for exercising control and more support than Female. Parents generally are more protective and stricter toward their daughters than sons. They worry about girls for possibility of attack or sexual assault.

As Emecheta defines the very thought of culture regarding women, "Clearly, the Igbo culture demonstrates a low opinion of women and it degrades them who are unable to do anything properly but eat, talk and sleep." (Emecheta, 1974) Women are forced to be submissive and

men to be abusive. "Women are suffering regardless of their education and economic empowerment as mentioned above, a significant finding highlighted by participants was that in today's modern society, even educated and financially autonomous women act submissive and tolerate." (Daley & Noland, 2001) Right from childhood, they are exposed by gender stereotypes which creates deep impact on them whether they are male or female. Thus, it expresses the unequal distribution of power among men and women and helps to underline that inequality, less power in hands of women more they are prone to violence and abuse at personal and public domain. It is evident that parents of married victims in both African and Indian cultures usually ask their daughters to mute and obey her husband, who is her master. This adjustment with cruelty and toleration towards suffering would protect the Honour and prestige of her parents. There is no rescue for her, not even from her parents.

Through the character of Adah in the novel, Buchi Emecheta explores how as daughters and as wives 'as women, are dominated by other family members, sometime in the name of culture, value, preference and authority. In the context of the novel *Second Class Citizen* the protagonist Adah's world was entirely controlled and he was dominated by men in her life. Adah is not entitled to take decisions for herself but her other family members take decision for her.

A little girl in Nigeria initially displays the gender problems during this African society. Adah being eldest child, but she was most unwanted and underprivileged child in her family because of her gender which was least important in her culture. "She was a girl who arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy. So, since she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. She was so insignificant." (Emecheta, 1974) Adah's brother is preferred for education, she is never appreciated nor encouraged for her studies or any decision she took in her life. Little Adah is not permissible to join school as a part of this male-controlled order in the community, still she finds her own way to challenge the persisting norms of her prevailing culture and society at a very small age. Adah expects that her teacher at college will appreciate her willingness to be educated. "She [Adah] felt Mr. Cole should have asked her why she came,

but being reassured by his smile, she said in her little loud voice: ‘I came to school – my parents would not send me!’ [...] Adah scribbled away, enjoying the smell of crawl-crawl and dried sweat. She never forgot this smell of school. [...] Pa would be all right: he would probably cane her, you know just a few strokes – six or so, not much – but Ma would not cane, she would smack and smack, then nag and nag all day long.” (Kandasamy, 2017) This bold action taken by Adah actually reveals protest against the social structure which bonded her in patriarchy.

Kandasamy’s personal allegory *When I Hit You* is an earnest acknowledgement of personality and adoration of women in a bad marriage. The memoirist narrative is stimulated by Kandasamy’s own previous relationship with her husband, about which she wrote for a leading Indian news magazine in 2012. The protagonist’s angst, anxiety, isolation, and anguish do not persuade her to raise voice over her discontentment and despise over her nightmarish marriage; more willingly it develops feelings of guilt complex, unconstructiveness, and low self-esteem in her married life. The unnamed narrator’s mother had focus on her parental obligation of getting her daughter married, but her marital bliss ended soon, and protagonist feels she is trapped and feels suffocated in her marriage. The only way she tries to find her expression is through her.

She finds no way out from outlandish marriage even her parent was very cold about her pathetic condition, actually they were reluctant to help her out instead wanted her to adjust with atrocities she was facing as part of marriage “My father on the phone: What is going on? Well, that is common. It is a matter of ego. I know you, you are my daughter, and you do not like to lose a fight. The marriage is a give and take. Listen to him.” (Kandasamy, 2017) Her parents’ attitudes demonstrate wider society’s systematic support and justification of abuse and reveal the changes that require it to happen no matter location or culture. In its brutal honesty and very real depiction of an abusive marriage, the novel demonstrates the systematic misogyny that exists no matter where you are. The novel considers the feminist voice around the globe today. Throughout the novel, the narrator never loses her dignity and even the most horrific events and situations are often conveyed with a touch of humor, demonstrating that she never lost her

humanity in the face of dehumanization. In novels, *Second Class Citizen*, and *When I Hit You*, the authors reveal the response of the protagonists subjected to the uncaring and intentionally negligent attitude of their families. The protagonists strive for their liberty and equality with their counterparts, undergoing immense difficulties, and gain them at the end.

### Male Backlash and Sexual Violence: Encounter of Unheard Voices in Select Novels

“Sexuality has an extremely complex relation to gender relations in general and gender inequality in particular.” (August, 2009) Sexuality is closely knotted with inequality in relations among the genders. “Gender relations are generally experienced as ‘natural’ rather than as something created by cultural and social processes.” (August, 2009) In the novel Francis inspired by his husband is portrayed as the tradition-bound and very typical Ibo male. Throughout the novel, Francis puts all his efforts to maintain authority and power over Adah also, conferring that no woman deserves to be free, assertive and independent. He regrets over his mistake by letting Adah come to England, “...Somebody had warned him that the greatest mistake an African could make was to bring an educated girl to London and let her mix with middle class English women. They soon know their rights.” (Emecheta, 1974)

Emecheta through her novel *Second Class Citizen* wants to highlight the problem of the equality among genders. Novel really focuses on circumstances and impacts of postcolonial period on characters. One of the most imperative problems is, the impact of British colonial rule over the native African community and even on the childhood of Adah. On the day, when Adah lands in London, she has a heated argument with her husband, in which he tries to slap Adah. On this act she was surprised that Francis would not hit her in the presence of his parent but here he shamelessly attempted to show his power over Adah “This scared Adah a little. He would not have dreamt of hitting her at home because his mother and father would not have allowed it. To them Adah was like the goose that laid the golden eggs. It seemed that in England, Francis did not care whether she laid the golden eggs or not. He was free at last from his parents; he was free to do

what he liked, and not even hundreds of Adah's were going to curtail that new freedom. The ugly glare he gave Adah made her that clear." (Emecheta, 1994) this incidence was a major setback for her; this was not the welcome he was expecting on arrival to her dreamland. Francis made Adah very well acquainted with his authoritative position in marriage.

Women go through silent suffering and abusive acts, just to maintain the dignity and honor of her family. She is grown up with the mentality of subordinate position in society. In Second-class citizen researcher found that protagonist Adah, the female from the time of birth faces discrimination and inequality in the hands of her own family, in her in-law's family, by her husband and more over by the society where she lives. "...she forgot that Francis came from another culture, that he was not one of those men who would adapt to new demands with ease, that his ideas about women were still the same. To him, a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and, if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave into, he ordered out of bed after he had done with her; to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time." (Emecheta, 1994)

Kandasamy through her unnamed narrator describes traumatizing experiences she says that "The man who rapes me is not a stranger who runs away. He is not the silhouette in the car park, he is not the masked assaulter, and he is not the acquaintance who has spiked my drink. He is the husband whom I have to make coffee the following morning..." (Kandasamy, 2017) from the above line it is evident that if violence and physical abuse is a fragment of relationship that pertains from equality and liberty of an individual. In this case it is the female partner, who is obstructed from equality in relationship. This issue is well quantified by EM Daley and Noland in their research article on "Intimate partner violence in college students: A cross-cultural comparison" claimed that "Higher rates of sexual violence are expected to be more prevalent in cultures that encourage objectification of women, thus making them appear inferior to men." (Daley & Noland, 2001)

It is often seen in societies around the world where manly role is prized better, may encourage them to feel superior to woman, and

they think dominating women is their 'rights' and any woman resisting, it's going to be taken as an immediate threat on their masculinity, they use a sexual assault and violence to resolve this crisis. Most of the patriarchal societies are witnessing a shift from being male dominating to being gender equal; "It is likely that in patriarchal cultures, any resistance from the woman victim is perceived by the offender as an insult to his 'manhood' further provoking him to resort to more violent means to control the victim." (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013) Kandasamy's protagonist says "I believed that no man, no husband could lay a hand on me. I was fierce and feminist and no-nonsense. Then, within an abusive marriage, I actually realized that your strength is also what makes you a perfect target for an abuser." (Kandasamy, 2017) For every dominating man it becomes a challenge and a conquest to overtake the control of strong woman a husband or any other male who could proclaim that women, as her property. "It has also been postulated that gender equality may increase sexual violence in the form of male backlash" (Martin K, 2006) "In addition to violence, the incident of sexual violence involves elements of control, power, domination, and humiliation." (Ward & Inserto, 1990) "In order to gain power and control over their victims, perpetrators of sexual violence resort to practices such as abduction, isolation, manipulation, coercion, threats, and sexual abuse." (Anderson, et al., 2008)

Kandasamy's Unnamed narrator husband is a devoted communist and ridicules his wife as "bourgeois" and a "bad comrade" whenever she disobeys him or he disagrees, he finds her a threat and tries to suppress the situation, he tyrannizes, knocks her down and even rapes his wife; while reproachful toward dehumanizing consequences of the capitalist system, he hits hard his wife's individuality "I must learn that a Communist woman is treated equally and respectfully by comrades in public but can be slapped and called a whore behind closed doors. This is dialectics." (Kandasamy, 2017)

## Conclusion

Buchi Emecheta's novel clearly delves into the anguish of women from patriarchy. Adah is a black American female who experiences oppression by her patriarchal family and racial

discrimination on the hand of whites. It means that women are only more supporters and subordinated to men. Women are anticipated to do and obey all that is ordered by men, whereas men are the most superior and dominant, or arrogant. Adah has to go through racism, patriarchy and sexism, and in her lifetime. Buchi portrayed real-life events related to her through Adah. Adah was an emotionally exploited in childhood to a limp relation with his husband then her struggle to emancipate herself to an enlightened and progressive woman. How, the black women in her dream land Britain encountered many grief and agonies in her life related to racism, discrimination she faces at home, in outside world and inner conflicts which shattered her dreams at the same time giving her inner strength to fight against all odds in her life. Adah has to face double sufferings that is being black and being

woman. Francis' dependency, his sufferings from the complex of inferiority and his immense jealousy and his growing distrust for Adah's marital fidelity.

Chronicles of Kandasamy truly becomes not just a treatise on the experience of domestic abuse but also on the power of language, the written word, and art not only as a form of self-expression, but as important statements. Kandasamy has brought the issue of marital rape, which is not much conversed in public domain. Women are treated unequal at every level and suffer this agony in silence for ages. Women are victims of sexual violence and male domination. It is evident that both novels given a detailed description of man' subversion before and after marriage that is prevalent in patriarchal culture in African and Indian culture.

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