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### ACT OF DEFIANCE: STUDY OF PASSIONATE QUEST FOR GENDER IDENTITY IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN AND MEENA KANDASAMY'S WHEN I HIT YOU

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#### Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to investigate the Act of Defiance, Gender Identity, several other issues and challenge faced by characters portrayed in the novels of Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit you*. Woman is born free as man but becomes subordinate sex 'the other' with overburden of societal rule and regulation. This is changing as women now do not conform but rebel. The quest for identity exhibits a basic human need. Most women around the world struggle with identity and confidence issues at some point in their lifespan. Struggle is not confined to certain era or generation, but she has been struggling for Age. The paper deal with the issue of defiance of the protagonists, their struggle for gender identity against social norms constructed to demolish equality status of women in patriarchy in society and family. Also, study role of education in their struggle for equality.

**Keywords:** Gender Identity, Act of Defiance, Patriarchy, Gender Equality, Power Game.

#### Introduction

"There is no 'beginning' of feminism in the sense that there is no beginning to defiance in women." (Rowbotham, 1972) Defiance is defined as the act of standing up to an opponent or authority. Paper aim is to highlight women in

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select novels of Buchi and Kandasamy who are not ready to settle down with their forced situation, they love themselves and want other to love them for who they are, freed from shame, freed from comparison, and liberal to be them. Paper also highlights sacred and honest place for any women in society and family and the courage they eventually show which was always there inside her allowing her to be a competent woman. Our society is filled with endless comparisons, for duties and performance which in turn developing enormous strain on them, and constantly horrifying them of being out casted. All of this leaves women with identity issues or brings to light the problems that are there right along and have not been addressed.

Generally, women are assigned two types of roles either they are conventional or traditional that I they must be silent and weak and the other one are unconventional or radical they generally breach the very accepted norm of society and called rebellions. It not that conventional' sufferings are any less that unconventional, but their sufferings are consecrated by the norms of a patriarchal male-oriented culture. The radical or unconventional women suffer due to defiance of the tolerated norms set by patriarchal society. Due warning is given to them, even if they are questioning the hierarchy and if any budding resistance is seen it is smashed with immediate effect. But our both protagonists are not submissive, they do not seem to be ready to compromise their identity and individuality. The years of societal and cultural conditioning teaches the women to be self-effacing, submissive and subordinate to men, suffering of a patriarchal society in silence." (Dr Syed Hajira, 2017)

### **Power game: Gender Identity**

The term gender Identity was originally coined by Robert J. Stoller in 1964. "Gendered identity is both categorical, centering on the awareness of oneself as biologically female or male, and variable, or influenced by social expectations and the degree to which one is feminine or masculine... Gender identity is the personal sense of one's own gender. Gender identity can correlate with assigned sex at birth or can differ from it." (Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender, 2008) Gendered identity is not entirely a result of personal choice but social structure play a pivotal role in framing and imparting specific role according to gender which lives with an individual for their entire life basically we can call them culturally specific gender roles, norms and socialization. The culture into which we are born will contribute to determining how we see ourselves as women or men because each culture has its own conceptions of gender. "Gendered identity can change over time; we can display different gendered behaviors at different times or in different situations." (Martina & Ruble, 2010)

### **Quest for Chasing Dream**

Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* protagonist Adah Obi thrives to go to Britain, and he reaches her dreamland, and explores the reality behind the colonial mask. Adah always wanted to be a part of the civilized world which she assumed in her mind was Britain. Adah considered that "[Francis's] was absolute African. Adah's fascination toward colonial society was evident through her desire to go

to Britain despite all difficulties. At the end of all her struggles, Adah succeeds in reaching Britain. Education is a mighty step forward for Adah in her various challenges, and she can free herself from the masculine bonds quickly because of the economic empowerment education bestows on her. Adah remains caught in patriarchy, as Francis proves to be an abusive and selfish husband.

Francis's incompetency to complete his exam or taking a job, makes him more condescending and arrogant in his relationship with Adah. Thus, economic and social realities have impacted to the instability of their relationship. Francis's failure makes him bitter; he punishes Adah for his perceived inadequacy by beating her; he belittles her, refuses to work, has affairs with other women, and even disallows Adah from using birth control. Black women on white land experience more violence because of "vulnerability due to their race, sex, and class." (Crenshaw, 1995) To Francis, "a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, ..., if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in, to be 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) On reaching England, Adah learns that she has to fight for rights and equality with not only his husband but also with mentality which was more growing in mind of fellow Nigerian that all Africans, both men and women are thrown together as second-class citizens. Black women face more challenges than men in the class system. According to Bell Hooks, "black women's social status is 'lower than that of any other' because of their place in society. They occupy the bottom place in society" (hooks, 1995) Francis tells her: "You may be earning a million pounds a day ... but the day you land in England, you are second class citizen. So you can't discriminate against your people because we are all second class" (Emecheta, 1994) The description "second class" has a psychological effect on Adah but, it was readily accepted by all other: "Francis had become so conditioned by this phrase that he was not only up to it but enjoying it too." (Emecheta, 1994)

### **Act of Defiance of Adah**

All African were ready to accept second class citizenship, but Adah is valiantly against such designation she is not ready to accept her mediocre position in society. Adah displeasures about her fellow people accepting of the status of second-class citizens, to which they need Francis to tug her, forcing her to simply accept work in the t-shirt factory to which Adah tenaciously refuses and instead applies for jobs where she utilize her university education. Here, Adah believe rebuilding her life and identity with the optimism she gained from her education provides her an opportunity to participate in fostering a more inclusive society. Emecheta exemplifies strength of a woman in an oppressive environment with her awareness and the determination that a woman can triumph over everything impossible and gain her status. "Through the character of Adah, Emecheta also emphasizes the significant function of education in the political, social and economic liberation of women as demonstrated by Adah. If Adah had not been educated, she would not have been able to become the family's breadwinner. With education, a woman is free." (Agho, 2011)

### **Quest for First Class Identity**

“Since ages, a woman’s role in life was strictly compartmentalized; she was a daughter, a wife or a mother. In all these roles she had to adhere to certain appointed norms; she had no separate identity as a human being. She is seeking the right to be regarded human being in wholesome, not simply as an adjunct to her male relatives” (Emecheta, 1994), but Adah is so resolute to fight against all embarrassing attitudes she faces in her life. It is only library where she feels first-class and this is due to her job a librarian at the American Embassy giving her joy and sense of fulfillment “first-class citizen’s job” in Britain. Gradually she gains economic freedom by her jobs at three different libraries. Her education, working experience and economic power fortifying her resistance toward Francis. For instance, she has a strong desire not to submit to her husband any more especially for the matters related to her body.

### **Power Dynamic: Quest for Freedom**

Kandasamy shows horrific picture of household where wife stay with husband, where husband employs number of tactic to keep wife under his control, the unnamed narrator shares her emotions, her experiences, and the role of society and relatives in Indian marriage at large. By that, Kandasamy successfully exposes the power dynamics that allow violence against women. “Kandasamy, talks about marital rape, physical violence, open threats and insults, and her language is raw, emotional and impactful. It is particularly remarkable how Kandasamy manages to make some jokes about her protagonist's dire situation.” (Ahmed, 2017) *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the writer as a Young Wife* is supported the author’s (Kandasamy’s) own experiences of marriages may be a very of-the-moment story of domestic abuse. After a courtship then two weeks of marriage, the husband (none of the central characters have names, just roles) burns himself with matches until she deactivates her Facebook account. The title of the book comes from one his poems called When I hit you, Comrade Lenin weeps. And when the narrator finally begins standing up for herself, she is raped every night.

### **Act of Defiance of Unnamed Narrator**

The unnamed narrator trapped within three rooms in Mangalore, yet it is also through writing that the only oases come. “I write letters to lovers I have never seen,” the narrator says: “to lovers I invent on a lonely morning. Open a file, write a paragraph or a page, erase before lunch.” (Kandasamy, 2017) This is her act of supreme defiance. When trauma is ever-present, the other qualities only have the option to mix with it. Kandasamy speaks through her unnamed character the pain and trauma through which she goes through, which crushes her soul, smashes her body and tear her identity and equality apart Kandasamy pour her pain in poetic style that how men demolish and Dwarf her existence, who threaten them and their powerful regime by disobeying them, they just mute and muffle their voices “Men are afraid of any women who make poetry and dangerous portents. Unable to predict when, for what, and for whom she will

open her mouth, unable to stitch up her lips, They silence her.” (Kandasamy, Nailed, 2010) A pen in woman’s hand can rattle up patriarchy, for this gives her immense power: to educate, agitate and organize.

Kandasamy portrays how Protagonist is oppressed and dominated by man through the novel. Finally, she rejects domination, Patriarchy and in doing so, releases herself from the roles of Unequal life Partner. Kandasamy (below) writes with poetic intensity. “Hope prevents me from taking my own life. Hope is the kind voice in my head that prevents me from fleeing. Hope is the traitor that chains me to this marriage.” (Kandasamy, 2017) This is why Kandasamy’s voice, her narration is so important: it punctures the social complacency and silence around violence, and stresses that women survivors. The perceived consequences of sexual violence vary across cultures. “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 squad, I stare down 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, 2017) Kandasamy’s Unnamed Protagonist suffers existential crisis, but soon decides that she will not allow herself to be lost. This affirmation is spontaneous. Kandasamy’s work is also a quest for respect and equality in life and marriage. The theme of novel *When I Hit You* is the struggle of a woman against tradition, sexual abuse and equality in marriage which continues even today.

### Conclusion

Education has been icebreaker in many situations, it helps in realization of the fact that oppression and suppression of women in marriage is due to unawareness of their right of equality. Awareness of the fact that they must stand for themselves and nobody else will be coming for their rescue. Both African and Indian literature, consequently, is male dominated. In their struggles against the social order, Adah and Kandasamy’s Unnamed Protagonist turns into a symbol of this anti-male domination crusade. Education had a vital role in the lives of protagonist, as intellectual minds and a questioning attitude towards this patriarchal and colonial order which aims to subordinate women as subservient creatures. Kandasamy’s and Emecheta’s novel leaves a positive impression. The experience shared by them can be acknowledged by all, as it effectively speaks on the theme of Pursuit for Identity. To Sum Up, the quest for identity as a theme clearly manifests in the novels of Kandasamy and Emecheta. Adah and unnamed narrator have managed to establish themselves as an individual fighter.

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