



Gender and Power in the Digital Age: A Comparative Reading of Contemporary Tamil and English Narratives

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital culture has transformed the ways in which gender, identity, power, surveillance, and resistance are produced and negotiated. Although digital platforms have created new possibilities for self-expression and visibility, they have also intensified older structures of social regulation by extending surveillance into everyday life. Contemporary Indian literature offers a productive space for examining these tensions because literary narratives frequently expose the relationship between intimate experience and wider structures of caste, patriarchy, social conformity, and institutional power. This article presents a comparative reading of Perumal Murugan's Tamil novel *Pyre* (*Pookkuzhi*) and Meena Kandasamy's English novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. While *Pyre* dramatizes the intersection of caste, gender, community surveillance, and violence through the story of an inter-caste marriage, *When I Hit You* examines patriarchal domination through domestic violence, intellectual control, sexual coercion, and the suppression of female subjectivity. The article argues that the power structures represented in these apparently different narratives can be productively reread through concepts associated with contemporary digital culture. Community gossip, social monitoring, control over women's bodies, enforced visibility, silencing, and the policing of identity in *Pyre* parallel contemporary forms of digital surveillance and networked social control. Similarly, the protagonist's struggle to retain her intellectual and narrative identity in *When I Hit You* anticipates contemporary

debates surrounding digital identity, technological control, and gendered self-representation. Drawing upon feminist theory, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, Michel Foucault's understanding of surveillance and disciplinary power, and intersectional approaches to gender and caste, this study demonstrates that digital modernity has not displaced traditional patriarchy but has provided new conceptual frameworks for understanding its continuing operations. The comparison ultimately reveals literature as an important counter-space in which marginalized female voices can transform imposed silence into agency and resistance.

Keywords: Gender, Power, Digital Culture, Patriarchy, Caste, Surveillance, Feminism, Tamil Literature, Indian English Literature, Resistance

Introduction

The relationship between gender and power has become increasingly complex in the contemporary cultural environment. The emergence of digital media has transformed communication, identity formation, social interaction, and political participation. Social networking platforms, digital archives, online communities, and algorithmic systems



have created unprecedented opportunities for individuals to produce and circulate representations of themselves. At the same time, digital environments have intensified practices of monitoring, judgment, comparison, exclusion, and control. Gender is therefore no longer regulated exclusively through conventional institutions such as family, marriage, religion, caste, and community. It is also negotiated through mediated spaces in which visibility itself can become a form of power.

The digital age has consequently generated an important contradiction. On the one hand, digital platforms can provide marginalized individuals with opportunities to speak, document experiences, organize collectively, and challenge dominant narratives. On the other hand, these same platforms can reproduce patriarchal expectations through surveillance, harassment, public shaming, sexual objectification, and control over self-representation. Feminist scholarship has increasingly recognized this double movement between empowerment and regulation. Research on digital self-monitoring, for example, demonstrates how technological environments can intensify the gendered gaze rather than simply liberate individuals from traditional social controls.

Literature provides an especially valuable space for examining these contradictions because literary narratives make visible the mechanisms through which power enters ordinary human relationships. Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* are particularly significant in this context. Murugan's *Pyre*, originally published in Tamil as *Pookkuzhi*, narrates the experiences of Saroja and Kumaresan, an inter-caste couple whose attempt to construct a life together confronts the violent caste consciousness of their community. The English translation by Aniruddhan Vasudevan appeared in 2016.

Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*, published by Atlantic Books in 2017, presents the experience of an unnamed woman whose marriage becomes a site of physical, psychological, intellectual, and sexual domination. The novel explores the transformation of a relationship initially understood as love into a structure of ownership and coercive control.

At first sight, the two novels appear to belong to different thematic fields. *Pyre* is strongly concerned with caste, inter-caste marriage, social exclusion, and community violence, whereas *When I Hit You* focuses primarily on domestic patriarchy, marital violence, female subjectivity, and the recovery of voice. Yet both texts are fundamentally concerned with the same question: **how does power regulate women's bodies, identities, choices, relationships, and voices?**

This article argues that the two narratives can be productively brought together through a digital-age framework. The purpose is not to claim that either novel directly represents contemporary social-media culture. Rather, the article uses concepts emerging from digital culture—surveillance, mediated identity, visibility, self-representation, networked control, and digital resistance—as interpretive tools for rereading older and continuing structures of patriarchal power.

The central argument is that digital modernity does not necessarily replace traditional forms of patriarchy. Instead, it makes visible their underlying mechanisms. The social gaze represented through the village community in *Pyre* can be compared conceptually with contemporary networked surveillance. Similarly, the husband's attempts to control the protagonist's intellectual and personal identity in *When I Hit You* can be reread alongside contemporary concerns about the regulation of women's voices and identities in mediated spaces.

The comparison is therefore significant because it moves beyond a simple thematic study of two novels. It asks how literary representations of gendered power can be reinterpreted in an age in which surveillance, visibility, identity, and self-expression increasingly operate through both physical and digital networks.

Review of Literature

Existing criticism on Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* has largely concentrated on caste, social exclusion, identity, violence, and the consequences of inter-caste marriage. Recent scholarship describes the novel as an exploration of caste, gender, social marginalization, and community surveillance. HariPriya and Ravichandran, for instance, examine the relationship between caste and gender and emphasize the novel's representation of social monitoring and the obsession with honor.



Similarly, Ancy K. S. examines *Pyre* through intersectionality and argues that caste and class combine to create distinctive forms of marginalization. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that Saroja's experience cannot be understood through gender alone. Her vulnerability emerges from the interaction between gender, caste, social location, and community power.

Other criticism has emphasized the dehumanizing dimensions of caste in the novel. The social environment surrounding Saroja and Kumaresan demonstrates how collective prejudice can transform private relationships into matters of community regulation. The violence of the novel therefore emerges not merely from individual hatred but from a social structure that legitimizes surveillance and punishment.

Scholarship on *When I Hit You* has developed along several complementary lines. Joy Das, for example, reads the novel through the ideas of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, particularly focusing on bodily autonomy, gender construction, marital rape, and the protagonist's reconstruction of the self.

Recent feminist criticism has also examined patriarchal family structures, domestic violence, female subjectivity, and resistance in the novel. Such studies demonstrate that the protagonist's oppression operates not only through physical violence but also through ideological expectations surrounding marriage, obedience, sexuality, and femininity.

Other scholarship emphasizes the relationship between silence and speech. The protagonist's inability to speak freely within the abusive marriage becomes an important aspect of her oppression, while writing ultimately becomes a mechanism through which she reconstructs her subjectivity.

Recent work has also begun to consider digital erasure and technology-facilitated coercive control in relation to Kandasamy's novel. This emerging direction is especially relevant to the present study because it indicates that the novel can be productively reread through contemporary understandings of digitally mediated power.

However, the existing scholarship tends to examine the two texts separately. Studies of *Pyre* generally emphasize caste and social violence, whereas studies of *When I Hit You* focus on marital patriarchy, violence, subjectivity, and resistance. The comparative relationship between community surveillance in a Tamil narrative and intimate surveillance in Indian English autofiction remains relatively underdeveloped. More importantly, there is scope to bring these structures into dialogue with the conceptual vocabulary of digital culture.

The present article addresses this gap by examining how **surveillance, visibility, identity regulation, bodily control, silence, and resistance** operate across the two narratives. It proposes that digital-age criticism can function not only as the study of digital texts but also as a contemporary interpretive framework through which pre-digital and non-digital narratives can be reread.

Research Gap and Novelty

The major research gap identified in this study is the limited comparative attention given to *Pyre* and *When I Hit You* as two narratives of gendered power operating through different social structures.

Previous studies have independently examined caste and gender in *Pyre* and patriarchy, domestic violence, and female subjectivity in *When I Hit You*. The present study extends this scholarship in three ways.

First, it establishes a comparative dialogue between contemporary Tamil literature in translation and Indian English literature.

Second, it connects caste-based community surveillance and marital surveillance to the wider conceptual field of contemporary surveillance culture.

Third, it argues that the digital age should not be understood merely as a technological period. It can also be understood as an interpretive condition that makes questions of visibility, identity, surveillance, self-representation, and mediated power increasingly central to cultural analysis.

The novelty of the study therefore lies in its movement:



from caste surveillance → domestic surveillance → digital surveillance

and:

from bodily control → identity control → mediated self-representation.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

1. How do *Pyre* and *When I Hit You* represent gendered power and patriarchal control?
2. How do caste, community, marriage, and social expectations regulate female identity and bodily autonomy?
3. In what ways can the surveillance and identity-control mechanisms represented in these narratives be reread through concepts associated with contemporary digital culture?
4. How do the female figures negotiate silence, visibility, self-expression, and resistance?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study employs a qualitative comparative literary methodology based on close textual reading. The primary texts are Perumal Murugan's *Pyre*, translated from Tamil by Aniruddhan Vasudevan, and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. The analysis concentrates on narrative representation, characterization, gender relations, social surveillance, bodily control, silence, identity, and resistance.

The theoretical framework combines feminist literary criticism, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and surveillance, and an intersectional understanding of caste and gender.

Butler's *Gender Trouble* challenges the assumption that gender is a fixed natural identity and conceptualizes gender as something repeatedly produced through social practices. This framework is useful for examining the expectations imposed upon Saroja and Kandasamy's unnamed narrator. Both women encounter social systems that attempt to define what a woman should be, how she should behave, whom she should marry, how she should speak, and how her body should be controlled.

Foucault's theory of surveillance is equally significant. Power does not always operate through direct physical force. It can function through observation, normalization, discipline, and the internalization of social expectations. Such a framework allows the village in *Pyre* and the marital household in *When I Hit You* to be read as disciplinary environments.

bell hooks' feminist theory further strengthens the analysis because it connects patriarchy with other structures of domination such as class, race, and social hierarchy. *Feminism Is for Everybody* explicitly addresses violence, race, class, work, and the need to challenge patriarchal culture.

The article also uses "digital culture" as a conceptual lens. Digital culture is understood here as a social environment characterized by intensified visibility, continuous communication, data-based observation, mediated identities, and networked forms of judgment. Research on digital self-monitoring demonstrates that technological environments can intensify the surveillance of women's bodies and appearances.

Gender, Patriarchy, and the Politics of the Body in *Pyre*

Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* constructs gender within the interconnected systems of caste, family, community, and social honor. Saroja's body becomes one of the primary locations through which the community attempts to preserve caste boundaries. Her marriage to Kumaresan is not treated as a private emotional decision. It becomes a social transgression because it threatens the reproductive and symbolic continuity of caste identity.



The importance of Saroja's body is therefore political. Her identity is questioned because the community assumes that the body carries visible and invisible markers of caste. The refusal or inability to identify her caste intensifies suspicion. The individual woman consequently becomes an object of collective investigation.

This process resembles surveillance. Saroja is watched, discussed, interpreted, and judged. Her actions are rarely allowed to remain private. The community transforms ordinary behaviour into evidence. Her presence in the village is therefore accompanied by continuous observation.

The significance of this mechanism becomes clearer when viewed through Foucault's conception of disciplinary power. Power becomes effective when individuals are placed within systems of observation and evaluation. In *Pyre*, the village functions as a social surveillance network. There is no need for a formal technological system because gossip, suspicion, kinship, caste hierarchy, and communal participation create an informal network of observation.

The novel therefore demonstrates that surveillance predates digital technology. Digital culture merely provides new technological forms for an older social logic.

Saroja's experience also reveals the gendered dimension of caste power. The control of caste is inseparable from the regulation of women's sexuality and marriage. Inter-caste marriage threatens the boundary between communities because marriage can alter social reproduction. Consequently, the woman's marital choice becomes a matter of collective authority.

This makes *Pyre* particularly significant for feminist analysis. Saroja is not oppressed by patriarchy in isolation from caste. Her vulnerability is produced through the intersection of gender and caste. Recent scholarship similarly emphasizes the intersection of caste, class, gender, and social exclusion in the novel.

The community's obsession with Saroja also anticipates contemporary forms of public judgment in digital culture. In contemporary social-media environments, personal relationships can become objects of collective commentary. Individual choices can be transformed into public controversies, and women may face disproportionate scrutiny concerning sexuality, clothing, marriage, relationships, and bodily appearance.

The comparison should not suggest that village gossip and digital surveillance are identical. Rather, both operate through a similar principle: **visibility becomes a mechanism of regulation.**

The social gaze in *Pyre* therefore provides a useful pre-digital model of surveillance. The community observes Saroja because her identity is considered socially consequential. Contemporary digital platforms can reproduce similar patterns through photographs, comments, searchable profiles, public discussions, screenshots, and algorithmically amplified visibility.

The novel thus demonstrates that technology does not create the desire to control women's identities. That desire already exists within patriarchal social structures.

Patriarchal Intimacy and Identity Control in *When I Hit You*

While *Pyre* presents surveillance primarily through community and caste structures, *When I Hit You* relocates gendered surveillance into the intimate space of marriage.

The unnamed narrator enters marriage with expectations of companionship, intellectual partnership, and emotional connection. Her husband, however, increasingly interprets marriage as a relationship of ownership. The transformation from love to possession is central to the novel. The publisher's description similarly emphasizes that what the narrator understands as love becomes, for her husband, a form of ownership.

The husband's violence is therefore not simply physical. It is epistemological and psychological. He attempts to determine what the narrator can read, whom she can contact, how she should behave, what she should write, and how she should understand herself.



This is an important form of gendered power because patriarchal domination often depends upon controlling the definition of reality. The abuser seeks not merely to control the body but to control the meaning of the woman's experiences.

The narrator's identity as a writer becomes particularly significant. Writing represents intellectual autonomy. Consequently, suppressing her writing becomes a way of suppressing the self.

Here Butler's concept of performativity becomes relevant. Patriarchal marriage demands that the protagonist repeatedly perform the role of the obedient wife. Her husband attempts to impose a particular gender identity upon her through repeated expectations and punishments. The "good wife" is constructed as obedient, sexually available, emotionally submissive, and socially dependent.

The narrator's refusal to remain within this performance creates conflict.

Recent criticism has similarly argued that the novel exposes the politics behind gender roles and the processes through which supposedly natural roles are socially constructed and enforced.

The novel consequently reveals a fundamental feature of patriarchal power: **control over identity is inseparable from control over the body.**

This has direct relevance to contemporary digital culture. Digital identity is also constructed through representation. Profiles, photographs, posts, messages, and online interactions become components of selfhood. Control over another person's digital identity can therefore become an extension of interpersonal domination.

Although *When I Hit You* does not need to be classified as a digital novel for this argument to be useful, its concern with the control of voice, writing, communication, and identity allows it to be reread in relation to the contemporary politics of mediated selfhood.

Surveillance: From the Village Gaze to the Digital Gaze

One of the most productive points of comparison between the two novels is surveillance.

In *Pyre*, surveillance is communal. Saroja is observed by neighbours, relatives, and members of the village. Her identity is collectively investigated.

In *When I Hit You*, surveillance is intimate. The narrator's husband attempts to monitor her relationships, choices, intellectual activities, and movements.

The difference is therefore primarily structural:

<i>Pyre</i>	<i>When I Hit You</i>
Community surveillance	Intimate surveillance
Caste-based regulation	Patriarchal marital regulation
Public social gaze	Private domestic gaze
Regulation of marriage	Regulation of identity
Community judgment	Spousal control
Collective violence	Intimate violence
Social exclusion	Psychological isolation



Yet the underlying mechanism is similar: both systems attempt to restrict female autonomy by making the woman continuously accountable to an external authority.

Digital culture expands this mechanism further. The contemporary digital gaze can be communal, intimate, institutional, and algorithmic simultaneously. A woman may experience judgment from family members, strangers, partners, employers, and online communities.

The concept of visibility becomes particularly important here.

Traditional patriarchal systems often seek to make women visible to authority while limiting their ability to speak publicly. Digital culture produces a similar contradiction: women can become highly visible online while having limited control over how that visibility is interpreted.

Thus: **visibility does not automatically produce agency.**

A woman may be visible without being heard. She may be represented without controlling her representation. She may speak while remaining subject to systems that determine whether her speech is considered legitimate.

This tension is visible in both novels. Saroja is highly visible to the community but has little authority over the meaning assigned to her identity.

The narrator of *When I Hit You* is intellectually articulate but is subjected to a domestic system that attempts to invalidate her voice.

The digital age intensifies this paradox by making visibility technologically persistent and socially scalable.

Gender, Identity, and the Politics of Visibility

Identity is never merely personal in either novel. It is socially produced.

Saroja's identity becomes controversial because the community wants to classify her according to caste. Her identity is therefore determined through a social process of naming, categorization, suspicion, and exclusion.

The narrator of *When I Hit You* encounters a different form of identity regulation. Her husband attempts to redefine her as an obedient wife and remove the identities associated with her intellectual and creative life.

Both women therefore encounter patriarchal systems that attempt to answer the question:

Who are you?

But the answer is supplied by someone else.

This is one of the central mechanisms of gendered power.

The woman who controls her own identity threatens the social system that depends upon predetermined categories. Hence patriarchal systems frequently insist upon fixed identities—wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, respectable woman, caste woman, obedient woman.

Butler's theory is useful here because it emphasizes that gender identities are repeatedly performed and socially maintained rather than simply expressing an internal essence. In *Pyre*, the expected performance is that of the caste-compliant woman whose marriage reinforces community boundaries. In *When I Hit You*, the expected performance is that of the obedient wife whose behaviour confirms patriarchal authority. Both narratives expose the violence that can follow when women refuse or fail to perform these prescribed identities.

Digital culture adds another layer. Online identity is also performative. Users curate photographs, biographies, opinions, affiliations, and narratives. Women in particular may face pressure to construct identities that satisfy cultural expectations of femininity.

The literary narratives thus become unexpectedly contemporary. Their central concerns—identity, visibility, social judgment, and control—remain deeply relevant even when the original narratives are not technologically digital.



Silence, Speech, and Female Resistance

Resistance in both novels is closely connected to voice.

In *Pyre*, Saroja's vulnerability is intensified because her social environment does not recognize her as an autonomous subject. Her voice is overwhelmed by the collective authority of the village. The community speaks about her before it listens to her.

In *When I Hit You*, the problem is different but related. The protagonist is an educated writer, yet her husband seeks to suppress her intellectual and communicative independence. Her writing eventually becomes an important means of reclaiming selfhood.

Recent scholarship has interpreted the novel specifically through denied speech and enforced silence, arguing that patriarchal power operates by invalidating the woman's capacity to articulate her own experience.

This distinction between **being silent** and **being silenced** is crucial.

Silence can be voluntary, strategic, or resistant. But enforced silence is a form of power.

The protagonist's eventual narrative act transforms silence into testimony. The act of writing becomes an alternative space in which patriarchal authority can no longer fully control meaning.

This has particular significance in the digital age.

Digital culture has lowered some barriers to publication. A woman can now create a blog, post a testimony, publish an article, upload a video, or communicate through social media without depending entirely on traditional publishing institutions.

Yet the digital environment also creates new risks: trolling, harassment, doxxing, image-based abuse, surveillance, and public shaming.

Consequently, the digital age produces both:

new spaces of speech and **new mechanisms of silencing**.

The resistance represented in Kandasamy's narrative can therefore be connected conceptually with contemporary practices through which women use writing and mediated communication to reclaim authority over their experiences.

Caste, Gender, and Intersectionality

A major distinction between the two texts is the centrality of caste in *Pyre*.

A purely gender-based reading of the novel would be insufficient because Saroja's experience is shaped by the intersection of gender and caste. Her body is not controlled simply because she is a woman; it becomes the site of caste anxiety because her marriage crosses a social boundary.

This intersectional dimension complicates conventional feminist interpretations.

Gender oppression does not operate identically for all women. Social location—including caste, class, language, region, and economic status—changes the form and intensity of oppression.

This is one reason why the comparison with *When I Hit You* is productive.

The protagonist of Kandasamy's novel experiences patriarchal domination within an educated, intellectual, and urbanized environment. Yet education does not automatically eliminate gender inequality.

The comparison therefore demonstrates two important points. First, modernization does not necessarily eliminate patriarchy. Second, patriarchy does not take a single form. In *Pyre*, patriarchal and caste authority is communal. In *When I Hit You*, it is intimate and marital. In contemporary digital culture, it can become networked. This progression suggests



that the structures of gendered power are adaptable. Their social forms change, but their fundamental objective—regulating women's autonomy—can persist.

From Traditional Surveillance to Digital Surveillance

The concept of surveillance provides the strongest bridge between the literary texts and contemporary digital culture.

In traditional societies, surveillance may occur through:

- family observation;
- village gossip;
- caste networks;
- community judgment;
- moral policing;
- institutional authority.

In digital societies, comparable processes may occur through:

- social-media monitoring;
- location tracking;
- online harassment;
- image circulation;
- algorithmic visibility;
- digital reputation systems;
- monitoring of messages and communication.

The technologies differ, but the cultural logic can overlap. Both systems establish norms and identify deviations. Both can reward conformity. Both can punish perceived transgression. Both can make individuals regulate themselves because they anticipate judgment.

This is particularly significant for gender. Digital self-monitoring research demonstrates that technology can intensify the monitoring of women's bodies and appearances, creating a technologically reinforced form of the gendered gaze.

The literary texts therefore help reveal the cultural history behind digital surveillance. The digital gaze did not emerge from nothing. It extends older social practices of watching, judging, categorizing, and disciplining. *Pyre* represents the communal gaze. *When I Hit You* represents the intimate gaze. Digital culture potentially combines both.

Resistance and the Recovery of Agency

Despite their different narrative situations, both texts ultimately raise questions about agency.

Saroja's agency is severely restricted by the caste-patriarchal structure surrounding her. Her decision to enter an inter-caste marriage represents an attempt to exercise personal choice against collective authority. Her relationship with Kumaresan becomes an act of resistance because it challenges the social assumption that caste should determine intimate life.

Kandasamy's narrator develops another form of resistance. Writing becomes central to her reconstruction of identity. Her narrative transforms private suffering into public testimony.



This distinction is important:

Saroja resists through embodied choice.

Kandasamy's narrator resists through narrative voice.

The two forms of resistance are complementary.

One challenges the social control of the body.

The other challenges the control of meaning. Together they suggest that agency can operate through both action and representation. The digital age has expanded the importance of this distinction. Contemporary resistance often occurs through representation: testimony, hashtags, digital storytelling, online communities, videos, essays, and public narratives. Yet digital resistance remains vulnerable to counter-surveillance and harassment. Therefore, the literary texts offer an important caution. Technology alone cannot guarantee liberation. Agency depends upon the social conditions that determine whether a voice can be heard and whether a woman can control the representation of her own identity.

Comparative Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals five major parallels.

Power over the Body

In *Pyre*, Saroja's body becomes a symbolic site of caste anxiety. In *When I Hit You*, the narrator's body becomes a site of marital control and violence. Both narratives reveal that patriarchal power becomes particularly visible when social authority claims the right to regulate women's bodies.

Power over Identity

Saroja's caste identity is investigated and socially constructed by others. The unnamed narrator's identity as a writer and independent woman is challenged by her husband. Both texts therefore demonstrate that identity becomes political when social institutions refuse women the authority to define themselves.

Surveillance

The village in *Pyre* and the household in *When I Hit You* operate as surveillance environments. The digital age extends these mechanisms through technological visibility and networked observation.

Silencing

Both narratives represent attempts to control women's speech. In *Pyre*, the collective voice of the community overwhelms the individual. In *When I Hit You*, intimate patriarchal power attempts to suppress the woman's intellectual and narrative voice.

Resistance

The two texts also demonstrate different forms of resistance. Saroja's marital choice challenges caste and gender authority. Kandasamy's narrator uses writing to reconstruct the self. The comparison therefore suggests a movement from **bodily resistance to narrative resistance**, both of which have contemporary relevance in digital culture.

Major Findings

The study produces the following findings.

First, gendered power in contemporary Indian narratives is inseparable from broader structures of social authority. Gender cannot be studied independently of caste, marriage, family, community, and class. Second, surveillance is not exclusively a technological phenomenon. *Pyre* demonstrates how communities can create highly effective surveillance systems through gossip, observation, suspicion, and social regulation. Third, *When I Hit You* demonstrates that intimate relationships can become disciplinary structures in which patriarchal authority regulates bodily, intellectual, emotional, and communicative freedom. Fourth, digital culture provides a productive contemporary framework for



rereading these mechanisms because contemporary technologies intensify visibility, identity management, and surveillance. Fifth, the comparison demonstrates that modernization does not automatically eliminate patriarchal power. Instead, older structures can adapt to new cultural and technological environments. Sixth, female resistance is closely associated with self-representation. Saroja's choice to cross caste boundaries and the narrator's decision to reclaim her story both challenges externally imposed identities. Finally, literature functions as a counter-surveillance space. The literary narrative records experiences that oppressive systems attempt to suppress, thereby allowing marginalized perspectives to enter cultural memory.

Conclusion

The comparative reading of Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* demonstrates that gendered power operates through multiple and interconnected structures. In *Pyre*, caste and patriarchy converge to regulate marriage, identity, sexuality, and community belonging. In *When I Hit You*, marriage becomes a disciplinary institution through which a woman's body, voice, intellectual identity, and autonomy are controlled.

Although the novels emerge from different linguistic and narrative contexts, both reveal a fundamental feature of patriarchal power: the attempt to transform women from autonomous subjects into socially manageable objects.

The digital age provides a new vocabulary for understanding this process. Surveillance, visibility, mediated identity, self-monitoring, and networked judgment have become central features of contemporary life. Yet the literary narratives demonstrate that the cultural logic behind these practices is considerably older than digital technology.

The village gaze in *Pyre* can therefore be understood as a pre-digital form of networked surveillance. The husband's monitoring of the narrator in *When I Hit You* can be understood as an intimate disciplinary structure that anticipates contemporary concerns about control over communication and identity. Digital technology does not invent these structures; it potentially amplifies them.

At the same time, digital culture creates opportunities for resistance. The ability to narrate one's own experience, construct alternative identities, document violence, and communicate beyond immediate social structures can challenge traditional monopolies over representation. Kandasamy's emphasis on writing is especially significant in this context because narrative becomes a method of recovering authority over the self.

The comparison ultimately demonstrates that **power depends not only upon controlling bodies but also upon controlling visibility, identity, language, and representation**. Conversely, resistance begins when individuals reclaim the authority to define themselves.

The significance of these two novels in the digital age therefore lies not in their technological content but in their continuing relevance to questions that digital culture has made more urgent: Who has the right to watch? Who has the right to speak? Who controls representation? Who defines identity? And what happens when women refuse the identities imposed upon them?

By placing Tamil literature and Indian English literature in comparative dialogue, the study also demonstrates the value of multilingual literary scholarship. The movement between Tamil and English does not simply compare two languages; it reveals how different literary traditions articulate interconnected experiences of gender, caste, patriarchy, violence, and resistance.

Ultimately, *Pyre* and *When I Hit You* remind contemporary readers that technological modernity does not guarantee social emancipation. The struggle for gender justice remains a struggle over bodies, identities, voices, and the right to narrate one's own life. Literature continues to provide one of the most powerful spaces for that struggle.



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