

Dealing And Resisting Verbal Aggression In (Husband-Wife) Abusive Relationships Through Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Reading Meena Kandasamy And Krishna Sobti's Fiction

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Abstract

Verbal aggression within marriage remains one of the least visible forms of domestic abuse despite its severe psychological consequences for women. In patriarchal societies, emotional humiliation, coercive communication, and linguistic domination frequently become normalized within marital relationships. This study examines the representation of verbal aggression and emotional resistance in *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* by Meena Kandasamy and *Mitro Marjani* by Krishna Sobti through the framework of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and feminist literary criticism. The primary objective of the study is to analyze how abusive language shapes female subjectivity and how women negotiate emotional trauma within patriarchal marital structures. The research adopts a qualitative comparative methodology based on close textual analysis of dialogue, narrative voice, emotional response, and interpersonal conflict in the selected novels. The findings suggest that verbal aggression functions as a mechanism of patriarchal control intended to regulate women's desires, silence dissent, and weaken emotional autonomy. At the same time, the protagonists develop distinct forms of resistance through assertiveness, cognitive reframing, emotional distancing, and narrative self-expression. The study concludes that literary narratives can illuminate psychological survival strategies associated with emotional resilience and cognitive resistance.

Keywords: Verbal aggression; Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; Patriarchal control; Emotional abuse; Feminist literary criticism; Psychological resistance; Meena Kandasamy; Krishna Sobti.

1. Introduction

Domestic abuse within marriage is often associated with physical violence, while emotional and verbal aggression remain comparatively neglected despite their severe psychological consequences. In patriarchal social structures, emotionally abusive language frequently becomes normalized through everyday interaction, moral judgment, humiliation, and coercive communication. Because verbal abuse leaves no visible physical evidence, it often remains socially invisible even when it produces lasting emotional trauma. Recent studies on intimate partner violence indicate that sustained verbal humiliation and emotional manipulation can destabilize emotional identity, weaken self-worth, and produce long-term psychological distress comparable to physical abuse (Dokkedahl et al., 2021; Walker, 2023).

Contemporary feminist scholarship increasingly recognizes language as a significant mechanism of patriarchal control. Roy (2022) argues that patriarchal discourse frequently regulates women's sexuality and emotional expression through shame-oriented communication and moral discipline. Similarly, Thomas (2023) observes that emotional violence within domestic relationships often operates through coercive language designed to normalize unequal power structures. Such patterns become especially visible in literary narratives where women's speech, silence, and bodily autonomy are continuously monitored and judged.

Indian feminist fiction has increasingly foregrounded these emotional dimensions of domestic oppression. Writers such as Meena Kandasamy and Krishna Sobti portray marriage not as a stable emotional institution but as a contested space shaped by domination, emotional negotiation, and resistance. In *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, Kandasamy explores the psychological suffocation of a woman trapped in an emotionally manipulative marriage structured through ideological and verbal control. Sobti's *Mitro Marjani*, in contrast, presents female speech and sexual assertiveness as direct challenges to patriarchal morality.

Recent literary scholarship further suggests that women's resistance in contemporary feminist narratives frequently emerges through fragmented and psychologically layered forms rather than heroic rebellion alone. Banerjee (2021) argues that emotional trauma occupies a central place within contemporary Indian women's writing, while Ghosh (2023) emphasizes that narrative agency becomes a means of resisting emotional erasure. Similarly, Nair (2024) observes that women protagonists in feminist fiction often reclaim subjectivity through acts of narration, emotional awareness, and refusal to internalize patriarchal shame.

The present study approaches these issues through the interdisciplinary framework of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and feminist literary criticism. CBT emphasizes the relationship between cognition, emotional response, and behavioral reaction. Emotionally abusive relationships frequently shape distorted beliefs regarding self-worth, emotional legitimacy, and personal identity. At the same time, cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, and self-awareness may function as mechanisms of psychological resistance and survival (Menon, 2024; Williams, 2024).

Rather than treating CBT as a clinical model alone, this paper uses it interpretively to examine how literary characters negotiate emotional trauma within patriarchal marital structures. The study specifically explores how verbal aggression shapes female subjectivity and how resistance emerges through assertiveness, emotional distancing, narrative self-expression, and cognitive resilience.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to examine the representation of verbal aggression and emotional abuse in *Mitro Marjani* and *When I Hit You* through the interdisciplinary framework of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and feminist literary criticism.

Research Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. examine the representation of verbal aggression within marital relationships in the selected novels;
2. analyze the psychological consequences of abusive language on female protagonists;
3. explore the relevance of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy concepts such as cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, and assertiveness in interpreting the protagonists' responses;
4. compare the resistance strategies employed by the protagonists against patriarchal domination and emotional abuse.

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to feminist literary scholarship by drawing attention to verbal aggression as a serious yet frequently neglected form of domestic violence. While existing studies on the selected novels primarily focus on patriarchy, sexuality, and resistance, comparatively limited attention has been given to the psychological dimensions of emotional abuse. By integrating feminist literary criticism with CBT, the paper offers an interdisciplinary understanding of how language functions as a mechanism of patriarchal control and how emotional survival emerges through cognitive resistance.

Research Contribution

The study makes three important contributions. First, it expands existing feminist literary discussions by focusing specifically on verbal aggression rather than physical violence alone. Second, it introduces Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as an interpretive framework for understanding emotional abuse and psychological resistance in literary narratives. Third, the comparative analysis of Kandasamy and Sobti demonstrates how women negotiate patriarchal domination through distinct yet psychologically significant forms of resistance.

Research Outline

The paper is divided into six sections. Following the introduction, the literature review examines previous scholarship related to emotional abuse, feminist resistance, and psychological trauma. The methodology section explains the qualitative comparative approach and theoretical framework adopted in the study. The discussion section analyzes verbal aggression, cognitive resistance, and emotional survival in the selected novels. The final section summarizes the findings, limitations, implications, and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly discussions on domestic violence increasingly emphasize that emotional abuse functions as a sustained form of psychological domination rather than isolated interpersonal conflict. Dokkedahl et al. (2021) argue that verbal aggression and emotional intimidation produce long-term psychological consequences that frequently remain underestimated because they lack visible physical evidence. Walker (2023) similarly notes that repeated humiliation and emotionally degrading communication often generate fear, dependency, confusion, and emotional fragmentation among victims of intimate partner violence.

Recent feminist scholarship has also highlighted the role of language in maintaining patriarchal authority. Roy (2022) argues that patriarchal discourse frequently disciplines women through shame-oriented communication that regulates sexuality, obedience, and emotional expression. Thomas (2023) further observes that emotionally abusive language often normalizes unequal power relations within domestic environments by presenting female silence as a moral expectation.

Within literary studies, increasing attention has been given to trauma narration and emotional survival in feminist fiction. Banerjee (2021) suggests that contemporary Indian women writers frequently portray emotional trauma as an everyday consequence of patriarchal control rather than as an exceptional experience. Rao (2022) extends this discussion by arguing that narration itself becomes a strategy of emotional survival through which women reconstruct fractured identities and reorganize traumatic experiences.

Research on Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* primarily focuses on coercive control, ideological manipulation, and psychological violence. Sharma (2021) interprets the narrator's writing as a process of reclaiming identity against emotional erasure. Das (2023) similarly argues that emotional abuse in South Asian feminist fiction often operates through psychological destabilization rather than overt physical violence alone. The narrator's struggle therefore reflects a broader tension between emotional autonomy and patriarchal domination.

Critical discussions surrounding Krishna Sobti's *Mitro Marjani* largely examine female sexuality and resistance to patriarchal morality. Singh (2023) argues that Mitro's outspoken speech destabilizes domestic authority because it openly articulates female desire within a structure built upon feminine silence and obedience. Chakraborty (2024) further suggests that speech and silence in Indian women's narratives frequently operate as political and emotional acts shaped by patriarchal surveillance.

Recent interdisciplinary studies have also connected emotional trauma with psychological resilience. Menon (2024) argues that emotional resistance in feminist trauma narratives often emerges through cognitive awareness and reinterpretation of oppressive experiences. Williams (2024) similarly emphasizes that cognitive reframing allows individuals to challenge emotionally harmful narratives and reconstruct fractured self-perception.

Despite these scholarly interventions, several limitations remain visible in existing research. Most studies on the selected novels focus primarily on patriarchy, sexuality, and resistance while paying comparatively less attention to verbal aggression as a distinct psychological structure of domination. Similarly, limited scholarship has connected feminist literary analysis with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and cognitive models of emotional survival. The present study addresses these gaps by examining how emotionally abusive language shapes female subjectivity and how resistance develops through cognitive awareness, emotional regulation, and narrative self-expression.

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative comparative research methodology to examine verbal aggression and emotional resistance in *Mitro Marjani* by Krishna Sobti and *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* by Meena Kandasamy. The analysis combines feminist literary criticism with concepts associated with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to understand how emotionally abusive language shapes female subjectivity within patriarchal marital relationships. The study is guided by the research objectives mentioned in introduction.

The research primarily relies on close textual analysis of dialogues, narrative voice, emotional responses, and scenes involving humiliation, coercive communication, silence, and confrontation. Particular attention is given to how language functions as a mechanism of emotional domination within domestic spaces.

The study uses CBT as an interpretive framework rather than a clinical model. Concepts such as cognitive distortion, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and psychological resistance are employed to examine how the protagonists negotiate emotionally oppressive environments. The feminist perspective further helps contextualize verbal aggression within broader patriarchal structures that regulate women's bodies, emotions, and autonomy.

The comparative approach enables the study to identify differences in emotional survival strategies. While Mitro responds through verbal assertiveness and confrontation, Kandasamy's narrator gradually develops resistance through introspection, emotional distancing, and narrative self-expression.

4. Verbal Aggression and Patriarchal Control

Verbal aggression in both novels functions as more than emotional conflict between spouses. Language repeatedly appears as a disciplinary structure through which women's desires, choices, and identities are regulated. Humiliation becomes a method of control.

In Mitro Marjani, Mitro's openness regarding sexual desire repeatedly unsettles the patriarchal structure of the household. Her speech violates the expectation that female sexuality should remain silent, controlled, and domestically contained. The family therefore responds not simply with disagreement but with moral condemnation. Mitro is repeatedly labeled shameless and immoral because she refuses to perform the role of the obedient daughter-in-law. The accusations directed toward her reveal the extent to which patriarchal morality depends upon regulating female speech. Her body becomes threatening not because of physical action alone but because she verbalizes desire openly.

One particularly revealing moment occurs when Mitro openly complains about her husband's inability to satisfy her emotionally and physically. Rather than interpreting her dissatisfaction as part of marital communication, the family treats her speech as moral corruption. Her words disrupt the fragile structure of patriarchal authority because they expose male inadequacy within a system that grants men unquestioned sexual privilege.

Mitro's refusal to internalize shame becomes psychologically significant. Instead of accepting the abusive labels imposed upon her, she transforms humiliation into confrontation. From a CBT-oriented perspective, her response resembles cognitive reframing. The patriarchal household attempts to equate female desire with immorality, yet Mitro persistently rejects that emotional narrative.

At several moments, her speech appears deliberately excessive, almost provocative. Yet this excess carries emotional meaning. She weaponizes language because silence would require emotional surrender.

The emotional violence in *When I Hit You* operates differently. Kandasamy's narrator experiences verbal aggression through manipulation, gaslighting, emotional surveillance, and intellectual control. Her husband does not merely insult her; he attempts to reconstruct her perception of reality.

He repeatedly questions her intelligence, controls her writing, isolates her emotionally, and transforms ordinary disagreements into psychological domination. Sweet (2021) describes gaslighting as a process through which victims are pressured into doubting their own emotional experiences and judgments. This pattern becomes visible throughout the narrator's marriage.

At one point, the narrator reflects on how her husband dictates what she should think, write, and feel. The emotional intensity of these moments lies not in overt physical violence but in gradual psychological erosion. Her identity becomes increasingly unstable under continuous emotional pressure.

Unlike Mitro's open rebellion, the narrator initially withdraws inward. Her silence, however, cannot be understood simply as passivity. At moments, it appears closer to strategic endurance. She recognizes that direct confrontation may intensify emotional danger.

The contrast between the two protagonists reveals how emotional abuse adapts itself to different social environments. Mitro confronts traditional patriarchal morality directly, whereas Kandasamy's narrator encounters a more intellectual and ideologically sophisticated form of domination. Yet both novels suggest that verbal aggression seeks the same objective: emotional control.

The emotionally abusive language directed toward the protagonists reflects broader patterns of coercive communication identified within studies on intimate partner violence. Mukherjee (2023) argues that patriarchal marriages frequently normalize emotional manipulation through ridicule, surveillance, and psychological intimidation rather than overt physical violence alone. In both novels, emotionally charged language functions as a disciplinary mechanism intended to regulate female behavior and emotional autonomy.

5. Cognitive Behavioral Resistance and Emotional Survival

CBT emphasizes that emotional suffering often emerges through patterns of interpretation rather than external events alone. Both novels illustrate how women negotiate emotional abuse through forms of cognitive resistance that resemble emotional coping strategies associated with CBT.

Cognitive Distortion and Emotional Manipulation

In *When I Hit You*, the husband repeatedly attempts to impose distorted beliefs upon the narrator. He positions himself as intellectually superior while treating her emotions and opinions as irrational or immature. Over time, this emotional manipulation produces self-doubt.

The narrator gradually begins questioning her own reactions, a process frequently associated with coercive control. Stark (2023) argues that emotionally abusive relationships often function through surveillance, dependency, and psychological destabilization rather than visible violence alone.

Yet moments of cognitive resistance slowly emerge. The narrator increasingly recognizes that her husband's accusations are not objective truths but methods of domination. This shift becomes psychologically important because it interrupts the internalization of abuse.

Her awareness develops unevenly. At times she still doubts herself. At other moments, she observes the emotional cruelty of the relationship with startling clarity. These fluctuations make her resistance feel psychologically convincing rather than mechanically heroic.

Assertiveness and Verbal Resistance

Mitro's resistance appears more overt. Her assertiveness repeatedly unsettles patriarchal expectations surrounding feminine silence. She speaks openly about desire, bodily dissatisfaction, and emotional frustration.

One of the most significant aspects of Mitro's character lies in her refusal to treat shame as inevitable. The household attempts to regulate her through humiliation, yet she responds by amplifying her speech rather than suppressing it. Her verbal assertiveness resembles behavioral resistance associated with CBT practices that encourage individuals to challenge emotionally damaging narratives. She refuses emotional submission even while remaining trapped within patriarchal domestic structures.

At the same time, Mitro's confidence is not entirely uncomplicated. There are moments where her emotional aggression appears defensive, suggesting that resistance itself emerges from psychological pressure. This complexity prevents the character from becoming merely symbolic.

Writing as Emotional Reclamation

Writing becomes central to the narrator's emotional survival in *When I Hit You*. Through narration, she gradually reconstructs a fragmented sense of self.

Ahmed (2021) argues that speaking against oppressive systems often involves reclaiming emotional legitimacy. Kandasamy's narrator does precisely this through storytelling. She narrates her trauma not simply to describe suffering but to recover emotional clarity.

The act of writing allows her to reorganize experiences that had previously appeared chaotic and psychologically overwhelming. In this sense, narration resembles cognitive reframing. The abusive marriage attempts to define her identity externally, whereas writing allows her to reinterpret those experiences through her own perspective.

Importantly, the novel does not romanticize survival. Emotional recovery appears painful, unstable, and incomplete. The narrator's resistance develops gradually through emotional recognition rather than sudden empowerment.

Narrative self-expression becomes psychologically significant because it enables the protagonists to reorganize emotionally fragmented experiences. Patel (2023) observes that trauma narratives frequently involve attempts to reconstruct identity after psychological destabilization. Similarly, Iyer (2024) argues that emotional memory in contemporary Indian women's writing often emerges through fragmented narration that reflects the instability of traumatic experience itself.

Emotional Regulation and Survival

Both protagonists develop distinct forms of emotional regulation. Mitro externalizes emotion through confrontation and provocative speech. Kandasamy's narrator initially internalizes emotional conflict through silence and withdrawal before eventually articulating resistance through writing.

These contrasting responses reveal that psychological survival does not follow a singular model. Resistance may appear loud, confrontational, hesitant, fragmented, or deeply interior.

What ultimately connects both characters is their refusal to fully internalize the emotional narratives imposed upon them. Although the forms of resistance differ, each protagonist attempts to preserve emotional identity within structures designed to weaken it.

The protagonists' responses also reflect broader feminist discussions on emotional resilience and psychological survival. Srinivasan (2024) suggests that emotional regulation within feminist literary discourse frequently appears through fragmented forms of resistance rather than complete liberation. Such representations challenge simplistic assumptions regarding empowerment and instead foreground the psychological complexity of survival within oppressive structures.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined how verbal aggression operates as a mechanism of psychological domination in Mitro Marjani and *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*. The analysis demonstrates that emotionally abusive language in both novels extends beyond ordinary marital conflict and functions as a disciplinary structure through which patriarchal authority attempts to regulate women's identities, emotions, sexuality, and personal autonomy. Shame, ridicule, emotional intimidation, and coercive communication repeatedly appear as tools of control within domestic spaces.

At the same time, the novels do not portray women merely as passive victims of emotional abuse. Both protagonists negotiate oppression through distinct forms of psychological and emotional resistance. Mitro openly confronts patriarchal morality through assertive speech and refusal to internalize shame, while Kandasamy's narrator develops quieter forms of resistance through introspection, emotional distancing, and narrative self-expression. Their responses reveal that emotional survival often emerges through fragmented and psychologically complex processes rather than through immediate empowerment.

Reading these narratives through the framework of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) further highlights how emotionally abusive language influences cognition, emotional stability, and self-perception. The protagonists repeatedly struggle against distorted emotional narratives imposed upon them by patriarchal structures. Their acts of resistance resemble processes associated with cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, and psychological self-preservation. In this sense, the study demonstrates that literary narratives can illuminate forms of emotional resilience that parallel therapeutic understandings of psychological recovery.

Ultimately, the study argues that verbal aggression in patriarchal marriages cannot be dismissed as ordinary domestic conflict or emotional incompatibility. In both novels, language functions as a disciplinary structure that seeks to regulate women's identities, desires, and emotional autonomy. By resisting these emotionally oppressive narratives through speech, silence, narration, and cognitive awareness, the protagonists transform survival into a form of psychological and political resistance.

Implications of the Study

The study highlights the importance of recognizing verbal aggression and emotional manipulation as serious forms of domestic abuse with long-term psychological consequences. It also demonstrates how literary texts can contribute to discussions surrounding trauma awareness, emotional resilience, women's mental health, and gender-based violence. The interdisciplinary use of CBT further opens new possibilities for connecting literary studies with psychological and therapeutic approaches to emotional suffering and recovery.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to two literary texts and focuses specifically on heterosexual marital relationships within patriarchal contexts. Broader intersections involving caste, class, religion, regional identity, and queer experiences have not been explored in detail. In addition, the study interprets CBT conceptually rather than through clinical application.

Future Research Directions

Future research may examine verbal aggression and emotional trauma in a wider range of South Asian feminist writings or compare representations of emotional abuse across different cultural and linguistic traditions. Further studies may also explore literary trauma through frameworks such as psychoanalysis, affect theory, trauma studies, or mindfulness-based therapeutic approaches. Comparative interdisciplinary research connecting literature, psychology, and gender studies may further deepen understanding of emotional resistance and psychological survival in contemporary fiction.

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