



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MANGALAM AND THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The current paper makes an attempt to compare the drama *Mangalam* by Poile Sengupta and the recent movie *The Great Indian Kitchen* by R. K. Kannan to highlight the portrayal of domestic violence which stands as a reflection of every Indian house. Women especially in India face violence and exploitation all the three sixty-five days in a year. The comparative study shows how the exploitation is explicit and raw in the form of Physical violence, genital mutilation etc and at times it is very complex and sophisticated that it is hard to see with one's naked eyes and sometimes in the grossest manner which again makes it difficult to see with one's eyes. As explained by U. Vindhya, "Violence, whether domestic, or in any other form, is not merely a criminal act of physical force perpetrated against women. It covers the entire gamut of exploitation, discrimination, maintaining unequal economic and social structures and creation of an atmosphere of terror and threat, all of which are supported and mandated by the socio-economic context of power relations" (Kannabiran 197). The main issue that is discussed in Poile Sengupta's first full length play *Mangalam* is the violence faced by women characters in this play, is not merely physical, more often mental and emotional. She dramatizes serious social issues such as rape, incest, molestation, gender discrimination, domestic violence and many more into the light. She expresses the plight of rape victim, both in a traditional orthodox family and in a modern urban family. Similarly, the movie *The Great Indian Kitchen* also unfolds the story of a woman going through the grim reality of being a "home administer" and spending most of the time cooking and cleaning the mess on the dining table, floor, and the clogged sink. At a point, her hands start to stink due to repeated cleaning of the clogged sink and its leaking conduit. When it becomes unhygienic and sludgy in the kitchen, she requests her husband to call a plumber to repair it. However, he doesn't pay heed to her. Although she manages to dispose of the leaking sink water for many days, when several other unfavourable events swarm her up, her temper hits the brim, marking the climactic splash.

Keywords - Domestic violence, Gender, Exploitation, Discrimination, Patriarchy

## INTRODUCTION

Feminist research has always given central place to the power and hold the private space has over a woman's life. Family is such an institution which had been devised to keep women and their sexuality under control. One of the major weapons used by the close kin of women is violence to keep them inside the boundaries prescribed by the patriarchal society. Family is given such a venerable space in the society and culture that it becomes impossible to question it. This very private space becomes an ancillary of the patriarchy which unleashes domestic violence on women and it is so revered that the violence is quietly accepted and even justified by majority of women every day. The present paper focuses on Poile Sengupta's play 'Mangalam', which tries to reveal several types of violent actions inflicted on women and their timelessness. Most of the time it is inflicted by the family members themselves to restrain her and to show her, her place in this patriarchal society. In this scenario the lauded and celebrated safe heaven called family becomes the very

cite of oppression and torture for the female victim. There are several literary works which have taken the theme of domestic violence as their central idea. One such literary gems is Poile Sengupta's drama *Mangalam*' and *The Great Indian Kitchen* by R. Kannan.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MANGALAM

*Mangalam* is one of the earliest dramas written by Poile Sengupta in 1993. It was highly acknowledged and it also received a special prize for its social relevance in the Hindu Madras Players Playscript Competition, 1993. '*Mangalam*' is a two-act play. The dramatist has used the technique of play within the play to generate discussion and present her point of views through the characters. She has shown the timelessness of violence against women through this technique. To quote Sengupta, "It (the device) is used as a means to lend perspective to an issue. But in '*Mangalam*' I have used the same actors in both 'plays' as an indication that nothing really changes, the sameness of it all, to me, is deeply disturbing" (Sengupta 01). The title of the play is the name of the central character who is not present physically in the act, but pervades the drama and the action throughout the first act. The first act revolves around the unsuccessful and devastating marriage of Mangalam and Dorai. They are married off to each other for urgent, confidential and practical reason. There is an absence of any kind of mutual affection, communication or understanding between them. Both consider themselves victimized by the other and so are at constant war with each other. Dorai, being a husband has been given an upper hand in a patriarchal societal structure. He harasses Mangalam to such an extreme end that she embraces death rather than life with him. As the play unfolds, audience realizes that Mangalam is the victim of the vilest of crimes, but she is not able to express herself. One incidence- one heinous drunken act-rape by her drunk brother- in-law changes the course of her life forever. She is married off to economically poor Dorai, who comes to know of her pregnancy after marriage, which was an outcome of the atrocity committed on her. Dorai acts on impulse, branding her as characterless in his consciousness for the rest of their life together and punishes her in every way possible to avenge his betrayal by her and her father. She is humiliated, taunted, abuse physically and emotionally throughout her life by her husband who fails to understand her plight and silence. He interprets her silence as betrayal. Mangalam has to suffer in silence, because speaking up would compromise her family's honour. Perhaps she blames herself for whatever has happened with her or her fate, which is beyond her control. Mangalam has a troubled past which stops her from seeking help. This secrecy for the protection of family name is the very nature of the domestic violence. Kishwar and Vanitha in state in their article 'Initiative Against Dowry Deaths'

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN

R. Kannan's *The Great Indian Kitchen* is the official remake of the hit Malayalam film of the same title directed by Joe Baby in 2021. With forward thinking approach and a critical eye in the patriarchy around us, several films have pointed out how Indian women are often confined within the four walls of a kitchen.

The Movie revolves around a newly married couple Aiswarya Rajesh and Rajul Ravindran, set out to expose the patriarchal men that live among us. Aiswarya Rajesh plays a trained dancer and nameless woman in the film. She marries a sociology teacher and her routine after marriage follows a troubling pattern. She wakes up cooks, washes the utensils, cooks the next mean, washes the utensils and this cycle repeats. The kitchen and the clogged sink have become mundane and redundant. chopping vegetables, cooking, and washing reverberate monotony that eventually suffocates the audience. The recreation of the symbolism of the original like the kitchen and room grills reflecting prison bars and Aishwarya's character repeating the same set of clothes reinstates the tedium. Over time, it makes the oppressors, even the sub-conscious ones, uncomfortable and lets the oppressed feel represented.

When Aishwarya intends to attend a friend's dance program on a Sunday, her husband doesn't simply say "No" He instead says that Sunday is the only day he gets to spend with her. When Aiswarya receives a job offer, her father- in-law has his own way of being dismissive. Instead of wielding power, he gaslights by informing her that no materialistic job can come close to the satisfaction of being a homemaker. The Movie also shows her entrapment within the four walls especially during her periods, a complete disregard of her will, be it in a casual conversation she wants to have, or saying "NO" to sex because she is exhausted. The

story is not restricted to the mindset of men around Aishwarya, we get glimpses of Rahul's Mother and his sister, who is settled abroad. Although pregnant, she continues doing house chores and is unable to take good care of herself.

During the bride seeing ceremony, Rahul asks, "Do you like cooking?" Aishwarya replies, "I know how to cook" and as a joke he adds, "I like to eat". This conversation sets the tone of the movie. Nevertheless, *The Great Indian Kitchen* holds a mirror to society, pointing out the flawed thoughts, traditions and habits we continue to imbibe and pass on.

## CONCLUSION

Poile Sengupta and R. Kannan have portrayed how the sufferings are intensified just because one is a female. Be it her dreams, aspirations, security, dignity, self-esteem, self of belonging, love and care everything is shattered because she is a female. Pain for her only aggravates, justice seems farfetched and nobody can come to her rescue other than her own self. So, the woman of today has to learn to stand for herself, to become strong both mentally and emotionally, she should have the strength to stand against this hypocrite society for her rights. If Mangalam would have dared to stand for herself and not accepted her father's decision of hiding the rape incident and quietly marrying a man who had no compatibility to be married to her, she could have changed her fate. She should have voiced her complaint against her brother-in-law for raping her and should have got him punished. This right and timely decision could have saved her life and also her daughter Usha's life too. The Movie *The Great Indian Kitchen* ends with a scene showing her as an independent dance teacher arriving in her own car while her ex-husband is married again and the second wife seems to meet the first one's fate.

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