

A Peep into the Society through a Kitchen

Niva Jacob¹, Sashi B Gupta², Suganya PPK Pillai³, Chandrashekar M⁴, Preeti S⁵

ABSTRACT

Most females in our society are having a difficult married life but not many of them are having the privilege or courage to walk out of it or stand up for their rights, as they are uneducated or helpless due to financial dependence or even the societal pressure. After a period of sustained silence, they might end up having depression or other mental health issues or even end their lives. Some believe it is the right thing to do and enjoy it by blindly following it. Some suppress their emotions and dreams and passively live their life and go unrecognized. Some stand up for their rights and might even break their marriages. Some lucky females get to be married as well as live a life without such issues due to progressively thinking husbands and families where marriage is considered a partnership instead of ownership, where both partners accept egalitarian roles. The patriarchal ideas existing in the society and the magico-religious beliefs existing around menstruation are also addressed.

Keywords: Gender roles, Marital rape, Marriage, Menstrual myths, Movie review, Patriarchal society.

Indian Journal of Private Psychiatry (2021): 10.5005/jp-journals-10067-0119

A kitchen is incomplete without a female in it or that is how we are conditioned to think. We even glorify womanhood with the selfless work she does at home. Such a kitchen and household are brought to us by the Malayalam movie THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN directed by Mr Jeo Baby. The lead role is played by Miss Nimisha Sajayan, as her husband, Mr Suraj Venjaramood and Mr Suresh Babu as her father-in-law. For a story with multiple repetitive frames of the kitchen and its dark walls, the director has done magic with his presentation style. The lead characters are not given any names so that we could think of anyone around us in their roles and their realistic acting has made it easier that sometimes we feel hatred toward them as well as relatable. The movie is happening around a traditional Hindu household in Kerala. The difference in the bride and groom's house is shown even in the lighting. The dark walls of the husband's house and the kitchen which carries the ancient look and the colorful modern household of the heroine indicate the color of their thoughts too.

The couple is getting an arranged marriage considering their caste and status. For the lady brought up in a modern family, as a daughter of a father working abroad, well educated, and aspiring to become a dancer, the practices of the new family seem to be odd. While she was trying to get adjusted to it, the mother-in-law has to leave abroad to take care of her pregnant daughter. Following this, we can see the lady trying to fit into her mother-in-law's shoes and struggling with it.

Despite having specific interests in the way things are done, the males are never seen to lend her a helping hand and the mental and physical exhaustion of the heroine are left unattended. This shows how patriarchal ideas work in the society, thinking all these are a female's job and that is what a "good woman" is supposed to do.¹

The facilitation of men's lives by the lady goes unnoticed like the waste plate ignored on the dining table with wastes around it. When she mentions about table manners while at a restaurant, we can see the husband feeling insulted and later manipulating her into apologizing to him.

The lady gets a rest from these unending duties only when she is menstruating. The existence of strong magico-religious beliefs such as untouchability surrounding menstruation is illustrated in the movie. When the males are preparing for the temple visit, the

¹⁻⁵Department of Psychiatry, Spandana Nursing Home, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author: Suganya PPK Pillai, Department of Psychiatry, Spandana Nursing Home, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, Phone: +91 8891486544, e-mail: dr.sukanyapillai@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Jacob N, Gupta SB, Pillai SPPK, et al. A Peep into the Society through a Kitchen. *Ind J Priv Psychiatry* 2021;x(x):xx-xx.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

menstruating lady is kept isolated and asked to sleep on the floor, even seeing her is considered a sin. When she holds him after he falls from the scooter, we can see the priest telling him drinking cow urine is the solution, but since it is the modern world, he can just take some dips in the river. This shows how the rules change conveniently for the men. How the menstruating lady is treated and she is blamed for not knowing such beliefs are shocking for some; while relatable to many.

Stories of other females, like her friend living her dreams, show the reversal of gender roles assigned.¹ The happy husband bringing black tea for his wife is a hope we have in the progressive society.

The husband gets offended when she demands foreplay and ends up insulting her physical appearance. Many times the husband is having sex with her without a proper consent. At times her excuses are ignored and treats her like a property owned by him.²

After enduring oppression, the anger and helplessness pile up in her like the dirty water getting filled from the beginning of the movie. She finally stands up against it and leaves it all behind and lives her dreams proudly.

DISCUSSION

The heroine grew up seeing her mother taking up her father's roles too while he was away and being a powerful lady would have influenced her and made it difficult to accept traditional female roles, which caused the marital discord.³ We can see how girls are brought up to be served last and ease the life of men and the idea of marriage and being submissive to their husbands¹ are



Fig. 1: Great Indian kitchen pic

ingrained in us since infancy through lullabies,⁴ such children may even end up accepting violence later in their married life.¹ Even then her mother is not supporting her choice at first due to the stigmas around divorce.¹ Female's family is seen inferior to the male's family⁵ in most of the marriages, no matter how educated or wealthy she is. The society does not accept it when people stand against these cultural taboos.⁵ The ladies of the house are more emotionally adaptable and is expected from them whereas men are considered to have emotional stability, which is forcing them to act assertive³ and give them a feeling like females of the house should obey them.¹ Even though femininity in men is a quality required for close relationships, in a country like India, "feminine men" are considered inappropriate.³ It is a sad reality that ladies cannot have career choices, and even if she is educated, she should be kept at home for the better future of the next generation.¹

CONCLUSION

Most females in our society are having a similar life but not many of them are having the privilege or courage to walk out of it or stand up for their rights, as they are uneducated or helpless due to financial dependence or even the societal pressure. After a period of sustained silence, they might end up having depression or other mental health issues or even end their lives.⁵ Many psychosocial factors are involved in the development of depression and strained interpersonal relationship with in-laws; marital discords are some of the reasons which lead to adjustment disorders, depressive disorders, and anxiety disorders. The children brought up in such chaotic environments could grow up to have psychological

morbidities. Some believe it is the right thing to do and enjoy it by blindly following it like the father-in-law's sister. Some suppress their emotions and dreams and passively live their life and go unrecognized like the mother-in-law. Some stand up for their rights and might even break their marriages. Some lucky females get to be married as well as live a life without such issues due to progressively thinking husbands and families where marriage is considered a partnership instead of ownership, where both partners accept egalitarian roles (Fig. 1).³

ORCID

Niva Jacob <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3805-8796>

Sashi B Gupta <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4409-8164>

Suganya PPK Pillai <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1960-4579>

Preeti S <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9911-7927>

REFERENCES

1. Ali TS, Krantz G, Gul R, et al. Gender roles and their influence on life prospects for women in urban Karachi, Pakistan: a qualitative study. *Glob Health Action* 2011;4:7448. DOI: 10.3402/gha.v4i0.7448.
2. Trevelyan J. Marital rape. *Nurs Times* 1991;87(13):40–41. DOI: 10.4135/9781452229300.n1156.
3. Isaac R, Shah A. Sex roles and marital adjustment in Indian couples. *Int J Soc Psychiatry* 2004;50(2):129–141. DOI: 10.1177/0020764004040960.
4. Katyal A, Chanda I. How to be a good woman: The playway method. *Indian J Gend Stud* 1998;5(2):165–183. PMID: 12348889.
5. Elliott CM. Introduction. *Bulletin (Centre for Women's Development Studies)* 1999;6(2):177–184. DOI: 10.1177/097152159900600202.