



Unveiling the Kitchen: Patriarchy and Liberation in 'The Great Indian Kitchen'

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Abstract:

The Great Indian Kitchen," a poignant Malayalam film directed by Jeo Baby, serves as a compelling narrative that unravels the intricate layers of patriarchy deeply embedded within the Indian household, particularly in the domain of the kitchen. This paper explores how the film navigates the oppressive structures imposed on women within traditional familial setups, using the kitchen as a metaphorical battleground for gender dynamics and societal expectations. Through a feminist lens, the analysis delves into the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and liberation, juxtaposed against the backdrop of stifling domestic norms. It examines the subtle nuances of resistance and resilience portrayed by the female characters as they navigate the confines of their roles. Furthermore, the paper interrogates the societal constructs perpetuated by patriarchal ideologies, shedding light on the interplay between tradition, modernity, and individual agency. By deconstructing the symbolic significance of the kitchen space, this study seeks to unravel the complexities of gendered power dynamics and advocate for emancipatory narratives that challenge hegemonic structures. Ultimately, "The Great Indian Kitchen" emerges not only as a cinematic masterpiece but also as a powerful discourse on gender inequality and the quest for personal autonomy within the confines of a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender Roles, Feminism, Female Agency, Gender Inequality

Introduction:

"The Great Indian Kitchen," a Malayalam film (2021) directed by Jeo Baby, offers a poignant depiction of the patriarchal norms that pervade Indian society, particularly within the domestic sphere. Set in a traditional Kerala household, the film follows the life of a newly married woman as she grapples

with the oppressive demands placed upon her within the confines of her marital home. Through a nuanced exploration of the kitchen an ostensibly mundane space the film unravels the complex web of gendered expectations and power dynamics that define women's roles in Indian households.

The kitchen, traditionally considered the domain of women, serves as a microcosm of the larger societal structures that dictate and regulate women's lives. In "The Great Indian Kitchen," the kitchen becomes a site of struggle and resistance, where the protagonist's daily chores mirror her constrained existence and limited agency. By focusing on the seemingly mundane tasks of cooking, cleaning, and serving, the film exposes the invisible labor that women perform, often at great personal cost.

This paper seeks to analyze "The Great Indian Kitchen" through a feminist lens, exploring how the film portrays the protagonist's journey from compliance to resistance. It examines the ways in which the film challenges traditional gender roles and questions the normalization of patriarchal practices within the domestic sphere. Furthermore, this analysis aims to highlight the film's broader socio-cultural implications, particularly in its critique of gender inequality and its advocacy for women's autonomy and empowerment.

Through an in-depth examination of key themes, characters, and cinematic techniques, this paper aims to illuminate the significance of "The Great Indian Kitchen" as a powerful commentary on gender dynamics in contemporary Indian society. By shedding light on the film's portrayal of the kitchen as a site of both oppression and liberation, this analysis seeks to contribute to ongoing conversations about feminism, patriarchy, and the quest for gender justice in India.

In "The Great Indian Kitchen," patriarchy is a pervasive theme that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of the narrative. The film portrays how patriarchal norms dictate the lives of the characters, particularly women, shaping their identities and restricting their autonomy. One of the key ways patriarchy is depicted is through the division of labor within the household. Women are expected to fulfill traditional roles, such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving, while men are largely absent from these responsibilities. This unequal distribution of labor reflects larger societal expectations placed on women to prioritize domestic duties over personal aspirations. Another example of patriarchy in the film is the treatment of the protagonist by her husband and in-laws. She is expected to conform to their expectations without question, and her desires and feelings are often dismissed or ignored. This is seen in her husband's insistence on her adhering to strict dietary restrictions and his refusal to acknowledge her need for personal space and privacy. Similarly, her in-laws expect her to perform her duties without complaint, reinforcing the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her ability to fulfill her familial obligations.

Additionally, patriarchy is evident in the way women's bodies are policed and controlled. The film depicts how the protagonist is scrutinized for her appearance and behavior, with her choices being dictated by societal expectations of how a woman should look and act. This is seen in the pressure she faces to maintain

her physical appearance, even at the expense of her health and well-being." The "Great Indian Kitchen" offers a stark portrayal of patriarchy and its impact on women's lives. Through its depiction of the protagonist's experiences, the film sheds light on the ways in which patriarchal norms oppress women, restrict their freedom, and limit their opportunities for self-expression and fulfillment.

In a film "The Great Indian Kitchen," menstruation is portrayed as a taboo subject, reflective of the societal attitudes and beliefs surrounding menstruation in many parts of India. The film highlights how menstruation is often viewed as impure or unclean, leading to the marginalization and stigmatization of women during their menstrual cycles. This is seen in the protagonist's experiences, as she is expected to adhere to strict rules and practices during her period, such as sleeping separately from her husband and abstaining from certain activities. The film also references the Sabarimala temple, a prominent Hindu pilgrimage site in Kerala, where women of menstruating age were historically not allowed to enter. This exclusionary practice was based on the belief that menstruating women were impure and therefore unfit to enter the temple. The film uses this reference to underscore the broader issue of gender discrimination and the ways in which patriarchal norms are institutionalized in religious and cultural practices. By addressing the taboo around menstruation and referencing the Sabarimala controversy, "The Great Indian Kitchen"

sheds light on the deeply entrenched nature of patriarchy in Indian society and the ways in which it impacts women's lives. Through its portrayal of these issues, the film challenges viewers to reflect on and question societal norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination.

The Protagonist is prohibited from engaging in cooking or entering the kitchen during her menstrual period. This restriction is a reflection of the cultural taboo surrounding menstruation in many parts of India, where women are often considered impure or unclean during their periods. The film portrays how this belief manifests in various aspects of the protagonist's life, including her ability to participate in household activities and her interactions with her family members.

There is a scene where the husband scolds the wife about foreplay, which is a pivotal moment highlighting the patriarchal mindset and the objectification of women's bodies within the context of their marital relationship. The husband's attitude reflects a common societal expectation that women should be submissive and fulfill the sexual desires of their husbands without consideration for their own pleasure or autonomy. This scene underscores the unequal power dynamics in the relationship, where the husband feels entitled to dictate the terms of their sexual intimacy, dismissing the wife's feelings and desires. It also reveals the lack of communication and mutual respect in their relationship, highlighting how patriarchal norms can strain marital

bonds and erode individual agency. By depicting this interaction, the film sheds light on the ways in which patriarchal attitudes can permeate intimate relationships and contribute to the marginalization and objectification of women. It challenges viewers to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviors, encouraging them to question and challenge patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender inequality and undermine women's rights.

In "The Great Indian Kitchen," there is a scene where the husband follows certain cleanliness manners while eating at a restaurant but does not adhere to the same standards at home. This scene is significant as it highlights the double standards and hypocrisy often seen in patriarchal attitudes towards household chores and cleanliness. There is another scene where the mother-in-law always gives a pair of slippers to her husband before he goes out. This gesture symbolizes the traditional gender roles and power dynamics within the household, where the husband is seen as the head of the family and the wife's role is to serve and support him. This scene reflects the expectation that women should prioritize their husband's needs and comfort, even in seemingly small gestures like providing him with slippers. It also highlights the idea of women as caregivers and nurturers, responsible for attending to the needs of their husbands and ensuring their well-being.

By portraying this interaction, the film draws attention to the unequal

distribution of power and agency within traditional Indian households, where women are often expected to subjugate their own desires and needs for the sake of their husbands. It challenges viewers to reflect on these entrenched gender norms and consider the ways in which they contribute to gender inequality and the marginalization of women. In "The Great Indian Kitchen," there is a powerful scene where the protagonist, frustrated and feeling oppressed by the patriarchal norms in her household, throws the water from the sink onto both her husband and father-in-law. This act of defiance is a symbolic breaking point for the protagonist, representing her pent-up anger and desire to challenge the oppressive structures that confine her. The scene is significant as it marks a turning point in the protagonist's journey, where she begins to assert her agency and push back against the restrictive gender roles imposed on her. It also serves as a metaphor for the broader struggle against patriarchy, highlighting the ways in which women are often forced to confront and resist oppressive systems in their daily lives. By depicting this act of defiance; the film encourages viewers to question and challenge patriarchal norms and to consider the impact of these norms on women's lives. It underscores the importance of women's autonomy and agency, and the need for greater gender equality in society.

In the final scene of "The Great Indian Kitchen," the protagonist joins a dance class, symbolizing her newfound freedom and liberation from the oppressive

patriarchal norms that had confined her. This scene is a powerful conclusion to the film, as it represents the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and empowerment. By choosing to join the dance class, the protagonist asserts her right to pursue her passions and interests, independent of societal expectations. It is a moment of defiance and liberation, as she breaks free from the constraints of her marital home and embraces her own identity and desires. The scene also serves as a commentary on the importance of self-expression and autonomy for women, highlighting the transformative power of breaking away from traditional gender roles. It suggests that true empowerment comes from within, and that women have the agency to chart their own paths and define their own destinies. Overall, the final scene of "The Great Indian Kitchen" is a poignant and uplifting conclusion to the film, encapsulating its themes of resistance, resilience, and the quest for personal freedom.

In the "The Great Indian Kitchen," the protagonist's brother asks her mother for water, and she responds by scolding him and advising him to bring his own water. This moment is significant as it demonstrates the protagonist's transformation and newfound assertiveness. Throughout the film, the protagonist has been depicted as submissive and accommodating, fulfilling the demands and expectations placed upon her by her husband and in-laws. However, in this final scene, she stands up for herself

and refuses to continue to be treated as a servant or subordinate.

Conclusion:

"The Great Indian Kitchen" is a poignant and powerful film that offers a searing critique of patriarchal norms and gender roles within Indian society. Through its portrayal of the protagonist's experiences, the film exposes the oppressive nature of these norms and highlights the ways in which they restrict women's freedom and autonomy. The film uses the metaphor of the kitchen to symbolize the larger societal structures that dictate women's lives, portraying it as a site of both confinement and resistance. Thus the movie "The Great Indian Kitchen" is a thought-provoking film that raises important questions about gender equality, individual agency, and the quest for personal liberation. It serves as a rallying cry for greater gender justice and empowerment, urging viewers to strive for a more equitable and inclusive society.

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