



Breaking the Silence: Gender, Patriarchy, and Domestic Violence in Ammu

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ABSTRACT

Women face numerous challenges in life, but domestic violence affects them in particularly devastating ways, both physically and mentally. This paper analyzes how the South Indian film Ammu portrays the complexities of domestic violence within the framework of Indian society, focusing on the protagonist, Ammu and the restrictions she faces after marriage. The film highlights the pervasiveness of patriarchal power and its influence on a woman's personal freedom. Through the relationship between Ammu and her mother, we observe how deeply gender biases are ingrained within families and social norms. This paper also examines the historical and cultural contexts of patriarchy in Indian cinema, shedding light on how women's stories have evolved over time.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Domestic Violence, Freedom, Indian Cinema, Feminism, Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

In India, cinema stands as one of the most influential forms of mass entertainment, serving as a mirror reflecting societal values and attitudes. Through cinematic narratives, one gains insight into societal dynamics, from cultural practices to social hierarchies. Films not only reflect but also shape public perceptions, acting as tools for both reinforcing and challenging societal norms. A recurring theme in Indian cinema has been the representation of gender roles and, consequently, the depiction of women (Viridi). Traditionally, women's roles in Indian cinema have been marginalized. They have often been depicted as submissive and supportive characters, with their worth

tied to their relationships with men and their domestic roles. Such portrayals are symptomatic of patriarchal ideologies that position women in subordinate roles both on-screen and in reality. Although the representation of women has seen some progress, deeply entrenched gender biases persist. As noted by Ranjan (2018), while female characters are increasingly complex, foundational biases continue to permeate narratives (Kapadia 231,245). Films like Ammu confront patriarchal authority by centering women's experiences and spotlighting issues like domestic violence, which have historically been sidelined. Domestic violence remains a critical social concern in India, with almost 30% of



women aged 15-49 reporting experiencing physical violence, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) (2019-2020). This issue is rooted in the patriarchal belief system that positions men as superior and women as subservient, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and silence (Kaur and Garg-47,65). The film *Ammu* examines the underlying causes of domestic violence through the lens of patriarchy. In patriarchal contexts such as India, men are often positioned as the dominant figures, while women are expected to remain subordinate. Sharma (2019) emphasizes that patriarchy conditions men to perceive themselves as superior, leading them to believe they are entitled to control women, often through coercive measures such as physical and emotional violence (Ahmed-Ghosh 101,119). The character of Ravi, Ammu's husband, exemplifies this patriarchal entitlement. His violent reactions stem from a sense of superiority and the belief that Ammu must prioritize his needs over her own ambitions. For example, Ravi's resistance to Ammu's desire to work highlights a cultural belief that "real men do not eat off their wives' earnings," reflecting deep-seated toxic masculinity (Das-35,56; Sarkar and Sinha 69,85). Ravi's failure to recognize Ammu as an individual result in him lashing out at her physically. This behavior mirrors a broader societal issue where men perceive themselves as "protectors" and "controllers" of women, responding violently to any challenge to that authority (Sharma). The duality in Ravi's behavior devoted husband in public and abusive in private

exposes the pervasive nature of domestic violence in Indian society, as highlighted by (Purkayastha 12,23). A pivotal moment in *Ammu* occurs when she confides in her mother about the violence she has endured. Rather than providing immediate support, her mother initially questions whether Ammu's actions provoked Ravi's behavior. This reflects the generational legacy of patriarchal conditioning, where women themselves become enforcers of patriarchal norms (Rao 145,160). From a feminist standpoint, Ammu's quest for independence is deeply intertwined with her aspiration for financial autonomy. Virginia Woolf's argument that financial independence and personal space are crucial for women's freedom resonates with Ammu's desire to sew and earn money. Yet, Ravi's patriarchal outlook obstructs Ammu's ability to achieve financial independence, reinforcing the idea that a woman's place is confined to the domestic realm (Chakraborty 532,548). Throughout the film, Ammu gradually realizes that her husband's affection is conditional upon her subservience. Her growing recognition of her own value culminates in her eventual decision to leave him. However, this raises critical questions about autonomy: Can Ammu truly be free if she needs a man's assistance to escape her circumstances? (Rao 145,160). The portrayal of women in Indian cinema has undergone significant transformation over the years. The early cinematic landscape confined women to roles lacking individual depth, but contemporary films challenge traditional narratives. Films like *Ammu* reflect a growing



recognition of gender inequality and the necessity for systemic changes in the treatment of women (Kapadia 231,245; Sarkar 69,85). *Gender, Patriarchy, and Domestic Violence in Ammu* not only illuminates the devastating impacts on women but also questions the societal structures that perpetuate these issues. Through *Ammu's* journey, the film critiques entrenched patriarchal norms and offers a glimmer of hope for transformation. The film challenges audiences to question if true autonomy is attainable in a society that continues to uphold male supremacy.

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