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# **Women's Voices**

**Projection  
of Women  
in Literature**

*Editors*

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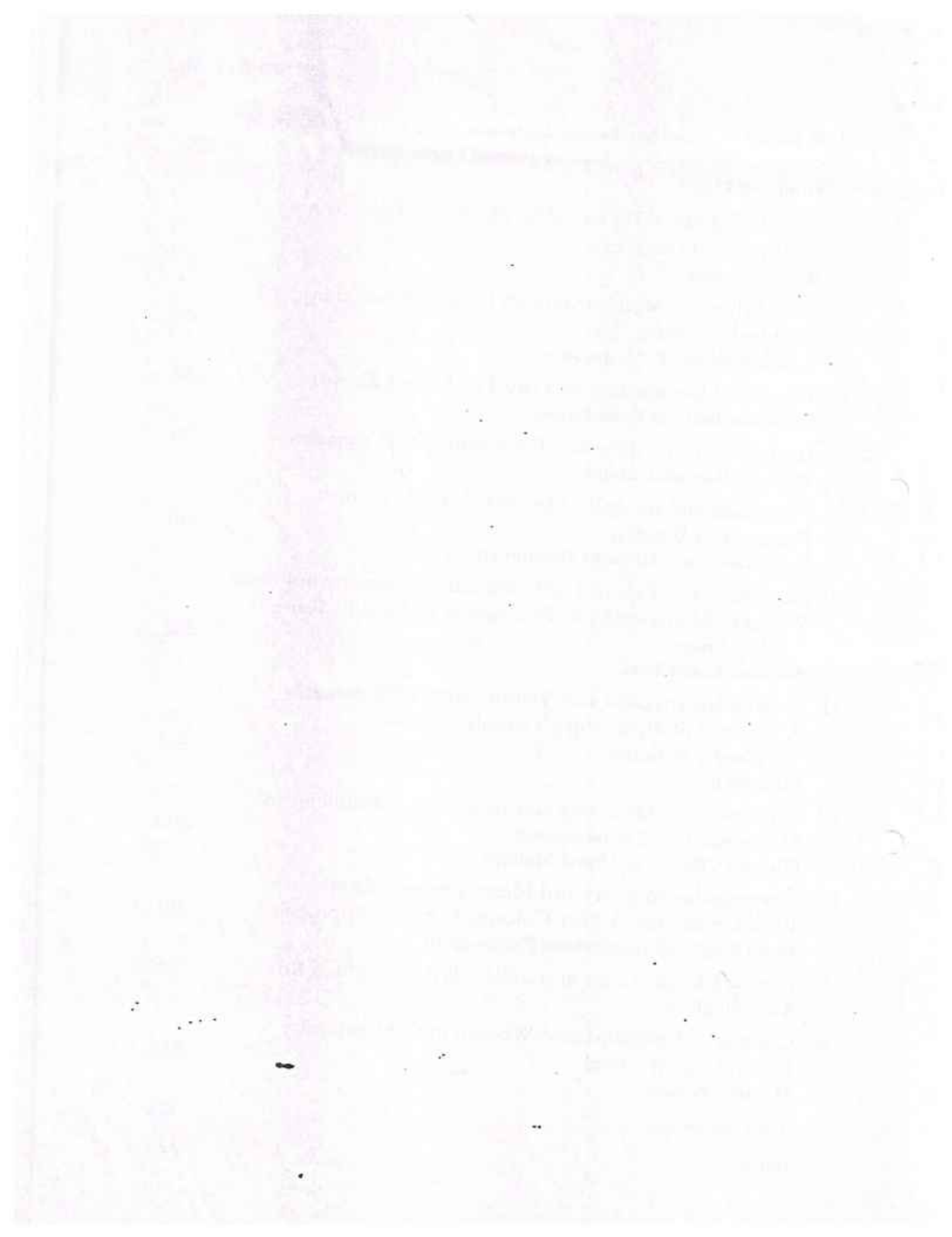


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## CHAPTER 28

# Institutional Atrocities and Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*

*Prashant Raosaheb Shinde*

### Abstract

Family and marriage institutions of Indian society are the major institutions. Both are interdependent. They play significant (adverse) role in the preservation of the society. As stated misogyny remains the perpetual nuisance in the lives of the female community members. Institutional discrimination means the atrocities have been awarded upon them. It is a state sanctioned discrimination where state cannot intervene in the matters of the marriage and family institutions. Even the female members could not withstand the unjust practices imposed upon the female characters in the play, *Mangalam*. It is notional these institutions treated as the pious and auspicious. As a result Poile Sengupta has ironically christened *Mangalam*, an eponymous play dominated by the victimization of the protagonist *Mangalam*. It is very difficult to raise voice against the life partner due to auspicious nature and place of husband in one's life. There is a great line of victims (Survivals) in the society but they have been crushed and suppressed under the notional load of the marriage and family institutions.

**Keywords:** Institutional atrocities, family and marriage institutions, patriarchy, misogyny

The drama *Mangalam* consists of two acts and its dramatist Poile Sengupta utilises the famous technique of play within the play, like Hamlet, to form discussion and put forward her narration throughout the characters. The playwright through this technique demonstrates the promptitude of violence against women. The objective of the technique is to highlight the intensity of the in-house violence. As per the play is concerned even homeliness becomes the den on of atrocities. For instance *Mangalam* stoically stomachs the unjust treatment given by her husband. 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”.

The play's title belongs to the protagonist 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 to each other for urgent, confidential and practical reason. There is not any sort of mutual affection, communication or understanding between them. Both consider themselves victimized by the other and so are at constant war each other. Dorai, being a husband has been given an upper hand in a patriarchal societal structure. His extreme harassment of Mangalam leads to her death rather than living with him. The play progresses and its audience comprehends Mangalam as the victim of the sordid crime; however, Mangalam fails to pour out herself. The odious incidence act of her rape by her floppy brother-in-law transmutes the course of her life perpetually. She marries to the economically poor Dorai but he knows about her pregnancy after their marriage and thus she becomes the victim of the atrocity on her. Her husband Dorai, who fails to understand her state and silence and interprets her silence as betrayal, is hurt by the betrayal by Mangalam and her father; and thus, considers her as characterless for the rest of their life and spoils and punishes her in all ways to avenge. Mangalam is taunted, humiliated, abused emotionally and physically her whole life by her husband.

Mangalam suffers everything silently, because she has to keep her family's reputation. She knows that she cannot control her destiny and dreadful happenings in her life. distressed past keeps stopping her from seeking assistance. This kind of protection of family name the brings domestic violence. Kishwar and Vanitha state in their article *Initiative Against Dowry Deaths*, “She (the woman) has been made to think of this (violence) as ‘normal’, ‘a woman's fate’, religious, films, her elders, her own and her mother's experience-tell her that if a woman is unhappy, nothing can be done about it. It must be her own fault” (John 45). So, Mangalam's life has never ending assaults not only on her mind but also her body; that is why, she determines to end up her life.

Thangam, Mangalam's elder sister, a strong character, dominating in nature, controlling others, is presented as a representative of orthodox and old generation. Being a traditional woman, she imposes her old values and truss on other women around her. As the most



straightforward character, she patently criticises Dorai's ill-treatment to Mangalam in an extremely vociferant manner. She takes her side as Dorai blames Mangalam as characterless. She denounces Dorai mistreating and torturing her as she says: Thangam: "..... But what else can I expect from my brother-in-law? He has been like this since the day he tied the thali around that poor girl's neck! That! It was more like a rope".

The use of the word Thali briefs a woman's experience in the marriage system in India, indicating how she is forced against her will to be a subordinate object or puppet in the hands of patriarchy. "Any traditional custom that places women in the subordinate positions within society or in the family has the potential to turn violent".

In traditional societies, marriage was universally deemed to be the significant point in a girl's life with no care of her caste, religion, class, and ethnicity. Marriage in India brings inequality to a woman's life. The woman is supposed and forced to forget an intrinsic part of her own identity and has to conform to an extrinsic one with asking no questions. She is to perform her roles of a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. She is not supposed to show her individual existence, her view point becomes secondary and if she strives to show independence, her own opinion, it is considered rebellious and is generally looked down upon by her in-laws. A woman's suppression in a traditional of her in-laws at several levels and it is assumed that she will accept all the changes occurred in her position post-marriage. Majority of women accept this kind of sacrifices are expected and demanded from women.

Thangam finds resemblance to Mangalam's marriage. The poor woman has to live a dissatisfied and distressed life, as a widow of a man, of an abuser, abusing her own younger sister. To save her family's name and her sister's honour, she fails to protect her own innocent sister against her husband's brutality. She knows both Mangalam and she is the victim of domestic violence equally. Her marriage abandons her from asking for justice. Keeping quiet, she must go through all this for the so-called prestige. She cannot ask for separation from her husband for her own and her natal family's sake. A separation could have followed by loss of honor and grim prospects for her natal family with a younger sister still unmarried. This way, both the sisters have become victims of this so-called patriarchal institution. They are left with no hope of justice or even express their agony. This kind of marriage system makes women

helpless, powerless, confidenceless and insecure they have to endure all the pain inflicted on them in the private space called 'home' and the family. "An analysis of the power hierarchy within the conjugal home would suggest some identifiable features – a gendered division of labor, the fact that in most Indian marriages women enter as stranger into an already structured world, the creation of a permanent inequality in the relationship of the natal and conjugal homes, and overarching domestic ideologies that legislate gender status and role".

Due the holy nature of the institution it becomes a notional legacy of suffering where daughters, mothers, great mothers and great grandmothers, etc. have never escaped from the suppressers and oppressors. To B. R. Ambedkar to deny the Shastra based institutions in order to breathe freshly, such institutions seem as the gas chambers to suffocate the Jews during Holocaust.

In this way, one cannot imagine the institutional or organised crimes against women in the Indian society. Poile Sengupta has tried to show the helpless and hopeless women in the society only of the patriarchy built misogyny.

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