Chapter IV

Trauma Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*

As the years have passed and technology has advanced, the world has experienced multitudinous changes that have made life easier, faster, and more enjoyable. Though women are educated and economically independent, they are still wretched. The stereotypical conception of men suppressing women has not changed and it is well expressed by Sherry Ortner in her article "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?":

> The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something we cannot rout out simply by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the
>
> social system, or even by reordering the whole economic structure. (67-68)

The abuse of women in the domestic space fails to garner enough of society's attention or it is deliberately ignored by the majority. When a human physically or sexually harms another person in the public sphere, it is considered a crime. However, when it occurs in the family, particularly between spouses, more specifically against women, it is not considered as a heinous crime or a social issue. The abuse of women is culturally implemented by the patriarchy to tame them. Violating human rights is an actual crime, but violations of women's rights in the domestic domain are not dealt with equally in any crime. The ill-treatment of women exists in an androcentric society since it is conceived, authorised, and erudite in a family structure which is considered the primary agent of socialisation.

The family is structured in a way that the man is the head of the family hierarchy, and he is entrusted with the right to make decisions, direct, and delegate authority to the members of the family. As the head of the family, the power he wields forces everybody to submit to him. The book, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* by Catharine Mackinnon helps to better understand the "gender as a form of power and power in its gendered forms" (Preface xi). Mackinnon believes that gender differences are man-made and observes that "difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination. The problem is not that difference is not valued; the problem is that they are defined by power" (219). She also firmly believes that the distinction between men and women arises not only from gender differences but also from dynamics of power and powerlessness. Elaine Showalter asserts that "gender is not only a question of difference which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal, but of power since in looking at the history of gender relations, we find sexual symmetry, inequality and male dominance in every known society" (4). While exploring the dynamics of power in *Behind Closed Doors*, Rinki Bhattacharya makes the following observation:

> An analysis of the power hierarchy within the conjugal home would suggest some identifiable features- a gendered division of labour, the fact that in most Indian marriages women enter as strangers 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. (qtd. in Ratnaparkhi 297)

This has been well understood by the playwright Poile Sengupta. She explores the brutality of the androcentric society in her play *Mangalam*. In *Mangalam,* issues of family politics are seen through the perspective of women. The play deals with "serrated relationships behind ostensibly normal households, whether in a small town in southern

India of the 1960s or a modern cosmopolitan family, perhaps in Chennai" (Sengupta 1). Similar to the genius playwrights like Shakespeare and Thomas Kid, Poile Sengupta has also used the technique of play within a play and in both plays she has used the same actors to point out that "nothing really changes; the sameness of it all" (Sengupta 1). This reaffirms the reality that the terrible plight of women has never changed from period of oblivion to period of activity; however, they are forever in a miserable state. They are caged birds at the hands of men who hold and wield power in their home. This play attempts to rake women's collective memory and make "an old scar burn alive again" (34).

A structure of inequality plays a crucial role in decoupling social resources and it is hard to imagine a society without violence. The "privileged group" (Connell 84) of men, use violence to maintain their dominance, especially in married life to control and subjugate women. In India, marriage is considered as a sacrament and that is expected to bring security, love, trust, and hope between husband and wife. Marriage disintegrates when the people involved forget the true essence of companionship or when one person takes power to dominate the other. Generally, in conjugal relationships, men are always in charge and are in control because they consider themselves superior to women and never allow women to take charge of the situation or family. In the Hindu religion, the word *sahadharmini* implies that women are the equal partners of men in all walks of life. However social structures do not give room for this equality. Married men rule their wives' lives and never give them the right to fend for themselves. In *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life*, Hammerton argues that the commonality of the male sex does not yet accept the idea of equal Coexistence. Simone de Beauvoir expresses the corresponding idea of Hammerton in her work *Second Sex*: "woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave, the two sexes have never shared the world of equality and even today woman is heavily handicapped" (352).

Society convinces women to endure abuse and suffering and to be dependent rather than empowered and independent. If they violate any feminine standards set by the patriarchy, they are considered sinners, rebellious, and witches.

To protect women from violence, the government and legal system enacted legislation such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005. However, this legislation has proven inadequate in eradicating the dehumanising practices of manhandling and abusing women within the domestic sphere. The term "domestic" is defined as "relating to a household or a family domestic life" ("Domestic"). It signifies a space where individuals may feel and be their authentic selves, as well as a locus of comfort, safety, protection, and love. The alarming prevalence of domestic violence compels us to critically examine the implications of the term 'domestic.' While domestic violence can be perpetrated by both men and women, the underlying power dynamics and gender disparities typically result in women adopting a more passive stance, rendering the phenomenon asymmetrical in most cases.

Domestic violence is defined as "any incident of threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners, or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality" ("Cross-Government" 3). The American rights organization, Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (ACESDV) defines domestic violence as "any behaviour the purpose of which is to gain power and control over a spouse, partner, girl/boyfriend or intimate family member" (qtd. in Hazarika 287). Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children designates domestic violence as:

> Acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through

> fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children. (qtd. in *Women's Legal Services* 7)

Domestic violence was not a criminalised offense earlier. Later, to protect individual rights, especially women, the judicial system enacted an act (Section 498A) to prevent and reduce crime within the family. However, women do not disclose the brutal behaviour of men; instead, they endure it to avoid the humiliation of others, and they are taught to accept the dehumanising act even if it endangers their lives. They are conditioned socially and psychologically to hold on to their husband until their very end. Domestic violence is also known as intimate partner violence, family violence, domestic abuse, coercive control, cross-bedroom terrorism, or patriarchal terrorism (Nigam). Johnson implies wife-beating as 'patriarchal terrorism.' In the article, "The Differential Effects of Intimate Terrorism and Situational Couple Violence," Johnson and Leone say that the patriarchal terrorism is "the attempt to dominate one's partner and to exert general control over the relationship, domination that is manifested in the use of a wide range of power and control tactics, including violence" (qtd. in Meier 4). The marital relationship is always inequitable to women compared to men since they are viewed and treated as sexual objects.

The percentage of domestic abuse against women increased by 53% between 2001 and 2018 and the data is extracted from the National Crime Record Bureau under "four domestic violence heading – cruelty by husband or his relatives, dowry deaths, abetment to suicide and protection of women against domestic violence act" (Mascarenhas). Since the lockdown, the National Commission for Women has received about 2000 complaints each month on average, and one-fourth of them are related to domestic violence. Data from NCW shows that between January and March 2021, it received 1463 reports of

domestic violence against women ("Complaints"). The sheer volume of reports substantiates our claim that home is not a place of safety for women; rather, it is a realm of terror. Many women writers feel that 'home' becomes the "microcosm of the callous macro world where many social evils and ills find a respectable shelter and patronage" (Bajaj 1). It also breaks the fatal assumption that women are free from subjection since they are educated and economically stable.

Domestic violence is fatal and it takes many forms: physical, sexual, and emotional or psychological abuse. Out of this physical abuse is a painful and more visible form of domestic violence. It is intentional harm to the body and is used to establish control over another human and is defined as "an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (qtd. in Straus 3). This includes: slapping, hitting, kicking, and killing a person with hands or objects. In intimate relationships, physical abuse is a chronic form of abuse and a man uses his masculinity or physical strength to control women when he feels anxious, frustrated, or inadequate.

The idea of gender and masculinity is a major contributing factor to interpersonal violence. A gender standard has been established by society to depict and define the function of sex. It assumes that women should retain specific feminine traits like reliance, emotion, perceptivity, tenderness, home focus, and passivity, while males should exhibit masculine attributes like power, dominance, exertion, and persistence. Failure to meet male role expectations leads to low self-esteem and other detrimental psychological effects, which Pleck calls "gender role discrepancy" or "incongruity" (qtd. in Burke 12). Men with low self-esteem think they are unlovable, unworthy, and incapable. Poor self-perception leads them to act erroneously or violently. In the play, Dorai has poor self-perception that he is not good enough to head and command the family since he is from a poor family, and doubts his authority. When Thangam rejects Dorai's marriage proposal,

his confidence gets a huge blow and he never forgets that rejection as he brings that up repeatedly in his conversation with Thangam:

> DORAI. (Exploring) Don't I know that? You have never allowed me to forget it. and why did you object to me? Because I was poor. Because my father was only a priest in a small temple. Because I was only a clerk and your father helped me to get that job. So you did not want me. And what happened to you? You were married to an engineer in a big firm. What did he leave you? He drank everything. He could not even give you a child, the eunuch, that … (6)

Dorai's low self-esteem threatens his standards of masculinity, so he uses aggression and force to win and restore his position. Pleck refers to the restoration of masculinity using force against non-masculine, feminine as a "reclamation model" (Fleming, et al., 252). Glanz and Schwartz agree with Pleck that a man with an imbalance of gender roles is considered a "stressor" and will try to "solve" the problem by being aggressive towards others, especially women, who help to emphasise his masculinity (275).

Dorai worries about being poorer than his wife. This makes him think that he is structurally excluded from the male power structure and that he feels "undermined and 'under threat' more frequently and thus find numerous ways to enact physical signifiers of masculinity, including violence, more frequently" (Fleming, et al. 252). Dorai's lack of professional achievement intensifies his inferiority complex, making him behave aggressively and violently. He beats his wife to get out of the fragile sense of masculinity to reinstate manhood. Additionally, Mangalam had conceived with someone before marrying Dorai, which aggravates his aggressiveness and physical abuse. He pesters her to reveal the identity of the person who is the reason for the pregnancy, but she refuses to do so. This makes him abuse her daily, and once he confesses it to Thangam:

THANGAM. So you stayed with her because of your greed for money. You stayed with her so that you could punish her every minute of her life. You mocked her and taunted her, you tortured her. I have seen the marks of your hands on her body. I have seen your nail marks.

DORAI. She would not tell me who the father was. First I used to as her softly, sweetly. She would not tell me. Then I beat her. She stayed so quiet. She would not even cry out in pain. She was so obstinate, … Then it became a game to see how I could take it out to her … (pause) She never told me. (24-25)

Dorai is mad to accept that his wife is always "the superior one. So superior" to him (14). So, to prove his superiority, he tortures her physically to the extreme he starts to sexually assault her every day. Sexual abuse is an attack on an individual's bodily integrity. Sexual abuse in an intimate relationship is more about power, control, anger, or revenge than sex. It is defined as ". . . sex without consent, sexual assault, rape, sexual control of reproductive rights, and all forms of sexual manipulation carried out by the perpetrator with the intention or perceived intention to cause emotional, sexual, and physical degradation to another person" (Abraham 592). Sexual violence consistently occurs in conjunction with other types of abusive behaviour, including physical and emotional abuse.

Sexual violence in marital relationships is known as marital rape. It is a pervasive form of abuse, and women in abusive relationships lack any self-determination over their bodies. Sex is essential in marital life and "there is nothing derogatory in sex as it is bedrock of all relationships" (Verma 194). Additionally, it aids in intensifying the bond between a husband and wife. The mutual understanding between the spouses will allow them to lead happy and prosperous lives physically and mentally. The unifying force,

however, generally degenerates into vengeful retaliation when wives refuse their husbands' approach. They must submit their bodies without resistance even if they are not interested in sexual intercourse.

Marital sex becomes coercive, dominant, and manipulative when women do not want it and it is no longer an image of mutual love and closeness. Marital rape is not considered rape by the society because it is acceptable by androcentric society, in the view of the fact that "wife is legally husband's sexual property" (Yllö and Torres 1). Furthermore, Yllö and Torres reference the statement made by the British jurist Lord Matthew Hale regarding the issue of consent, which asserts that, "The husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract" (Yllö and Torres 1). Marriage is defined in this context as the woman agreeing to all 'matrimonial obligations,' including sexual relations. Consequently, the concept of ownership serves to validate the regulation of women's sexuality, a practice that numerous legal systems have considered essential for upholding patrilineal inheritance.

Currently, only 52 countries have laws that recognise marital rape as a crime. Marital rape is not regarded as a crime by law and society in many jurisdictions around the world, including India. The law is still disregarded when the victim and the offender are married, even in nations that recognise rape as a crime and offer punishment for it. This is often referred to as the marital rape "exception clause" (Rath). Frances Ferguson (1987) observes that, under both "Hebrew and Saxon law, a husband's rape of his wife was theoretically impossible, since she "belonged" to him" (Projansky 4). In this context, the wife is regarded as the husband's property.

Dorai formerly has a lower economic standing than Mangalam, and when he knows that his wife is pregnant before getting married intensifies his resentment towards her. He is not willing to listen to his wife, his intolerance drives him to rape her every night to prove his masculinity. He keeps her pregnant every year so he can enjoy the agony and pain of Mangalam. Although the doctor advised Dorai not to have sex with his wife because she was weak, he neither cared for nor stopped his brutality. He exerts his power and control over Mangalam's body by exploiting her sexually and he thinks that it is the best way to take revenge on her. Through the conversation between Revathy and Thangam, it is clear that Dorai continues his abusive behaviour since his wife lost her beauty and health:

> REVATHY. And your sister. What do you think her life was? With a husband who hated her. I have seen her crying, every day she cried. She smiled only when he went out of the house. Once, he was gone for three days, and she laughed like a young girl, she sang songs. But when he was here, he made her suffer. He gave her children year after year so that he could see her suffer. Every night, he made her suffer. Even when the doctor said no … Do you know how she died? (22)

Similar to Mangalam, Saru in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* is also sexually assaulted by her husband Manu. Saru is a doctor and a more accomplished woman overall, but her husband does not have a successful career, which triggers his inferiority complex. He cannot withstand his wife's success since it raises questions about his masculinity. He uses his physical power to prove that he is more powerful than her to regain his authority. "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (200). A girl asked Manu when she interviewed him, which instigated him further, as it undermines his sense of masculinity and self-worth, and makes him feel less capable. His sexual sadism is the outward manifestation of his wounded male

pride. That evening, he treats Saru brutally, almost like a rapist, and though she is highly educated utterly she is powerless to resist him. The following passage from Shashi Deshpande exposes the patriarchal testaments:

> A wife should always be few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA you should be a BA. If he is 5'4'tall you shouldn't be more than 5'3'tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage...No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in favor of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favor, God help you, both of you. (137)

Moreover, women are not expected to be initiators in sexual relationships. "Males, on the other hand, are expected not only to take the initiative but also to overcome resistance and sometimes to consider resistance as a cover for sexual desire" (qtd. in Solomon 477). Clark and Lewis (1977) argue that gender socialisation results in women believing men have "rights over the distribution of female sexuality" (qtd. in Solomon 477). Clark's assertion is supported by Mangalam, who draws upon the experiences of her husband and Saru, an educated and economically independent woman in *The Dark Hold No Terror*. Both individuals permit their husbands to violate their bodies and remain in abusive relationships without any form of resistance.

Domestic violence can happen not only between partners but also between family members of the victims. Ex-partners, close family members, other relatives, fiancé, and close friends are all included. When Sumati and her fiancé were dating, Sumati was sexually assaulted by him. Couples are considered partially husband and wife when they are engaged. This idea led Sumati's fiancé to exploit her. Since he considers her his wife,

she becomes his property, and he has control over her body. The Hindi phrase ‘saali adhi garwaali hoti hain’ means a man’s sister-in-law is his ‘half wife,’ which encourages men to take advantage of other women in the family and exploit their bodies. The playwright shows this very explicitly through the character Mangalam. When Mangalam was home alone, her brother-in-law sexually assaulted her without any remorse. When she brings it up to the family, her father fails to support her instead, he lets the abuser go free.

Incidents such as these are not uncommon, as we find occurrences of similar incidents in the conversation between Thangam and Sumati. A girl, whose name is not mentioned in the play, is raped by her brother-in-law in the absence of his pregnant wife. Similar to Mangalam’s family, the victim’s family silences the victim and lets go of the abuser. Moreover, they also force her to marry the perpetrator. Sexual violence against women is not considered a serious crime in the family since it is a culturally accepted practice.

Reproductive control, also known as reproductive coercion, is a behaviour that subordinates a woman’s autonomy in making decisions about her reproductive health and is a form of sexual abuse in marital relationships. Pregnancy coercion, or controlling the outcome of a pregnancy and birth control sabotage, is a form of reproductive coercion. Dorai makes Mangalam pregnant every year, and he enjoys seeing her suffer and never cares about her pregnancy or her health. These actions of Dorai exhibit the aggression and arrogance he has towards his wife’s body, and she is not in a position to reject it, even though she dislikes it. Men abuse women sexually to assert their dominance over them, and they also devalue women by using them as sexual objects and a means of procreation.

Women are primarily objectified in the family. Women’s feelings are rarely respected, and men treat them like objects or property, particularly in the institution of

marriage. Marriage serves to bind the two souls together and defines human society, protecting it from randomness and prostitution. However, the truth is that family turns out to be the first place where women are openly sexualised and objectified. Objectification is the treatment of a woman as an object, the devaluation of her humanity, viewing her as less than fully human, and the denial of her mental and moral standing. Dworkin states that:

> Objectification occurs when a human being, through social means, is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold. When objectification occurs, a person is depersonalised, so that no individuality or integrity is available socially or in what is an extremely circumscribed privacy. Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination: those who can be used as if they are not fully human are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being diminished. (30-31)

Mangalam's father forcefully marries her to Dorai with a sufficient dowry since he sees her as a commodity. He prioritises the honour of his family over Mangalam's life and feelings. Dorai welcomes Mangalam's fortune rather than her. This demonstrates that Mangalam's father and husband do not value her as a person, and their actions undermine her dignity. To Dorai, Mangalam is just an 'object of appetite' to satisfy his sexual desires, aside from the fact that he has never considered her human or cared for her feelings. He frequently refers to Mangalam as 'it,' which demonstrates that he downgrades her from a person to a mere object.

The objectification of women has been common throughout the world for centuries. Sexual objectification is a form of gender oppression that involves treating women as a body. More than biology, according to feminists, the body is a social

construct, and it is central to women's oppression. They criticise it as well that standards and ideals based on men's physical capabilities are used to judge the inferiority of women's bodies. It is picturised well in the play through the character Suresh, Thangam's son in the second act of the play. To Suresh women are just "pawns" and he claims that "that the moment a woman doesn't fit into the category of being a mother or a sister, she's baggage ... (with a look at her mother) sexual baggage" (32). He dates many girls but is never serious about anyone. To him, being with girls is just a chess game, "there is only possibility of a check and a mate. A game. A sexual conquest" (47). He feels that his mother, Thangam, does not take him seriously when he speaks ill of girls, which gives him the license to criticise women further. Thangam's negligence demonstrates that she too accepts the fact that women are only here to appease men.

Girls and women are conditioned by an objectified cultural environment to value their appearance over knowledge and regard themselves as objects. Self-objectification refers to how women treat themselves as objects and give importance to their bodies. In Simone de Beauvoir's words, a girl becoming a woman is "doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she ...[also] exist[s] outside" (316). Therefore, Revathi focuses and works on her appearance for she strongly believes that men are attracted to the beauty of women. She says, "I am pretty, and men look at me, and I dress well," (22) which is obvious that she internalises a male observer's perspective of her body and values her physical attributes more than anything in her life. Thangam, Sumati's mother, even observes and supervises her daughter's dress. This demonstrates that women consciously or unconsciously favour objectification of themselves. That lowers them from a human to an object, especially a sexual object, and causes men to exploit their bodies and destroy their spirits. Since they are considered non-living, their emotions are invisible to men;

since their emotions are invisible, men use subtle abuse to undermine their mental stability by humiliating and criticising.

Emotional abuse, also known as "invisible wound" (Loring, 12), is a form of abuse that is emotional in nature rather than physical. It is hard to identify, but no less serious than physical and sexual abuse. Emotional abuse, interchangeably known as psychological abuse or verbal abuse and the main intention of this is used to dehumanise the victims without harming them physically. In the book, *The Emotionally Abusive Relationship: How to Stop Being Abusing*, Beverly Engel defines "Emotional abuse is any nonphysical behavior or attitude that is designed to control, intimidate, subjugate, demean, punish or isolate another person" (12). Men do not realise the importance of women's feelings. As a result, women lose confidence "in themselves and their abilities, their self-respect and self-esteem, feeling as they had been told so often, that they were 'worthless' and 'a waste of space'" (20). Physical abuse takes a toll on the body, but emotional abuse breaks a person's confidence, wearing away the sense of worth and crushing one's spirit. Perpetrators use emotional abuse to frighten, control, and isolate victims. It is a non-physical manifestation of domination and is used to intimidate the victim. This includes humiliation, verbal abuse, gaslighting, emotional blackmail, making every decision, blaming the victims for their problems, and emotional neglect. Man, emotionally abuses woman to manifest his power and control.

Humiliation is a significant factor that exacerbates emotional abuse and is a pervasive aspect of the human experience. It is an intense emotion characterised by feelings of insignificance, destruction, or annihilation. Victims of humiliation often experience a profound sense of uselessness and powerlessness. Thomas Friedman, a commentator based in New York, asserts that humiliation is "the single most underappreciated force in international relations" ("The Humiliation Factor"). This act is

frequently employed by offenders as a means to demean women, thereby reinforcing their feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. This dynamic is particularly evident in various cultural practices, such as the dowry system, which serves to commodify women and perpetuate their emotional abuse.

In various cultures, the dowry system serves to commodify women, reducing them to the financial valuation of their family's contribution. This commodification creates a framework in which the husband's family wields power over the wife, often resulting in emotional abuse. Women may encounter humiliation if the dowry is perceived as inadequate or if they fail to meet societal expectations (Sinha). Historically, the dowry was a gift willingly provided by the bride's family to the groom's family. During ancient times, women lacked inheritance rights, and the dowry was viewed as a means to compensate for this absence of property rights, providing financial security and serving as an independent source of income for them within their marital homes (Gupta). However, over time, this practice transformed into a compulsion and ultimately evolved into a social evil that oppresses women. Due to the negative implications of the dowry system, marriage has come to resemble an economic transaction. In response to the rising incidents of dowry-related deaths and crimes, the government enacted the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961.

In the play, Mangalam's daughter Usha confronts the pervasive social issue of dowry when she is subjected to a day of starvation by her in-laws due to her failure to meet their dowry expectations. Usha's in-laws express their dissatisfaction with the dowry she provided, demanding additional contributions. This demand is highlighted in a conversation between Mani and his wife, Revathy, during which Revathy voices her grievances regarding her husband's humiliation stemming from the inadequacy of her own dowry.

REVATHY. I'm telling you there was another silver kooja, there was. I remember it clearly. She took it out for Kannan's poonool. She must have given it to that sister of yours. As if she hasn't given her enough already. A steel cupboard last Deepavali, two silk vaishtis for you brother-in-law, a gold chain for his mother ...

MANI. That's enough. If she wanted to give things to her daughter she had every right to. She used to tell me that she never wanted Usha to be humiliated like she used to be in her husband's house.

REVATHY. What about my being humiliated in my husband's house. (1)

The pernicious custom of dowry has fuelled human greed and avarice, resulting in tragic occurrences known as dowry deaths. The failure of brides to secure an adequate dowry is often used to rationalise various forms of deprivation and violence, including "starvation, beating and burning," which led to severe injuries and "even death" (Dhobash and Dhobash 1). Dina Mehta illuminates this brutal phenomenon in her play *Brides are Not for Burning* through the character Lakshmi, who is set ablaze by her in-laws and husband, who then manipulate societal perceptions to frame the act as an accident rather than murder. Similarly, Manjula Padmanabhan explores the theme of bride burning in her play *The Mating Game Show*. In this narrative, the character Mani murders his three wives due to insufficient dowry and successfully convinces society that these tragic events were accidental.

Ignoring and neglect represent significant forms of emotional abuse, as they undermine a victim's emotional and psychological well-being through the withholding of affection, attention, or support. These tactics are employed to damage self-esteem, mental health, and emotional security, often serving as instruments of control and manipulation by the perpetrator. In the case of Usha, her emotions are systematically neglected and

ignored by both her in-laws and her husband. Her mother-in-law prohibits her son and Usha from engaging in intimate moments or participating in normal conversations typical of spousal relationships. Usha's husband aligns with his mother's directives, neglecting her during times when she requires emotional support and failing to challenge his mother's mistreatment of her. Furthermore, he disregards her feelings and does not prioritise spending quality time with her. Consequently, Usha's dignity is compromised, leading her to feel unimportant and worthless.

Poile Sengupta elucidates the emotional abuse experienced by women within marital relationships, as well as in their roles as daughters, through the characters of Sumati and Mangalam's daughters. Sumati's mother, Thangam, exemplifies a lack of maternal care and concern for her daughter. Sumati's feelings are deemed insignificant by her mother, who neglects her since she is a girl child. Throughout various situations, Sumati is consistently overlooked, as her mother expresses a clear preference for her son. Although Sumati receives necessities such as clothing and food, her emotional needs and feelings remain unacknowledged:

> SUMATI. No. Because, you let go of me. You especially. I had to do my growing up by myself, on my own. Oh yes, you gave me gorgeous clothes, and nourishing meals. It wasn't like the Doordarshan things that are shown … a care worn girl pecking at a dry roti while her brother gets all the milk. It wasn't that way at all. But did you ever ask me how it was for me at school, apart from my marks, that is? What I thought of my friends, my teachers, whom did I love most? I don't even remember your singing me to sleep. You brought me up, efficiently, correctly, but without soul. (34)

When Dorai learns that Mangalam was conceived before their marriage, he becomes suspicious that his wife may have engaged in infidelity. He subjects her to daily

torment and publicly humiliates her in front of his guests in an attempt to assuage his doubts. Dorai's incredulity prevents him from maintaining composure. To ascertain whether the children are his legitimate heirs, he scrutinises every man who enters his home, comparing their features to those of each of his children. The playwright illustrates Dorai's ill-mannered behaviour through the character Thangam, who engages in a fiery exchange with him to defend her sister, Mangalam: "but you were never sure of them either, isn't it? was Usha your daughter or his? And Mani, whose son was he? You used to watch every man who came to the house. Could this be him? was this him? even when she had lost all her beauty and was carrying Kannan, you used to have suspicions. You were like a mad man" (25). Dorai dehumanises Mangalam, treating her as subhuman. He creates a hostile environment where she cannot express herself or control her happiness, living in constant fear and uncertainty as she faces humiliation and abuse. To perpetuate his heinous acts without interruption, he socially isolates her.

In emotionally abusive relationships, social isolation is frequently employed as a deliberate tactic by the abuser to exert control and manipulate the victim. By severing the victim's connections to friends, family, and social support networks, the abuser enhances their power and influence. In the scholarly article titled "Isolation of Women in Situations of Violence by Intimate Partners," Leônidas de Albuquerque Netto et al. examine the assertion that this tactic is "structured against the woman's bonds of conviviality in their social network, damaging their relationships with people with whom they maintain emotional ties" (2). This form of isolation manifests through various strategies, including limiting communication, controlling movement, undermining relationships, and instilling guilt.

Social isolation functions as a mechanism of control that keeps the victim dependent on the abuser, thereby complicating efforts to seek assistance or escape the abusive situation. In the case of Mangalam, her husband prohibits any intimacy between her and her family members, effectively severing her social ties. He forbids her from communicating with her sister, Thangam, and as a result, Mangalam lacks friendships or close relationships. This isolation leaves her feeling numb and passive. Furthermore, to evade additional shame and humiliation, she may choose to cut ties with others.

Like Mangalam, her daughter Usha is also estranged from her family and community due to her in-laws. This separation is revealed by the playwright through the dialogue between Thangam and Dorai, where it becomes evident that Usha is not allowed to reside with her family, nor are her family members permitted to stay with her.

> THANGAM. Have you even gone to their house? Have you visited your daughter even once? No. Why? Because they don't like it . . They won't allow you anywhere nearby. Your samandhi ammal is quite capable of giving you a broom and asking you to sweep the hall … anyway what is the use of talking? What is done, is done. (18)

Even in Mangalam's death, Usha is not permitted to stay for long; her in-laws compel her to leave by forcing her to lie that her husband has work. As a result of this isolation, the victims lose their connections with the outside world and experience profound loneliness. The process of social isolation encompasses emotional isolation, characterised by a reluctance or incapacity to express one's emotions to others. Individuals who experience social isolation often do not engage in emotional exchanges or receive support, resulting in a sense of emotional numbness and detachment from their feelings. This isolation causes both Mangalam and Usha to feel lonely and results in their inability to establish a sense of social belonging.

Verbal abuse is a type of emotional abuse that is more prevalent in intimate relationships and is manipulative and unpredictable. It is used to exert power and control over the victim, much like physical abuse. It is designed to make a vulnerable person feel uncomfortable, harassed, or offended, or it can be concealed and appear as a false concern that misleads the target. The various multifaceted strategies employed by verbal abusers can be used alone or in combination to deal the most severe blow to a victim's self-esteem.

To humiliate Mangalam, Dorai calls her names like "whore," "prostitute," and "bitch" (24) in the presence of others which causes her to break down, and as a result of which she gradually cut her ties with the outside world to avoid further insults. He even mocks Thangam as a widow and a barren woman. In front of his family, he calls her "head shaven woman" (4) and tries to belittle her. His daughters' closeness to their mother, annoys him and he calls them "whores" (14) to express his disappointment. He considers women to be expendable and that as the head of the family, he can exploit them however he pleases. He never gives women the chance to make decisions for themselves to establish his authority. Regarding their careers or choosing a life partner, he never lets his daughters make any independent decisions.

Decision-making is the central task in any family. In the patriarchal setup, the decisions are always taken by men, which changes the lives of other members of the family. Polsky writes, "one can conceive of 'power' – 'influence' and 'control' are serviceable synonyms – as the capacity of one actor to do something affecting another actor, which changes the probable pattern of specifies future events. This can be envisaged most easily in a decision-making situation" (qtd. in Lukes 17-18). He implies that those who have prevailed in decision-making will be more powerful in social life. Since women have lost the right to decide for themselves, there cease to be any development or improvement in their lives. Ignoring and transcending women in a family not only

devalues women but also circumscribes and restricts their function and polarises them from society. This would help men to withhold their power and maintain control over women.

Usha is an intelligent and ambitious young woman who endeavours to excel academically; however, her father, Dorai, obstructs her pursuit of higher education by arranging for her to marry a wealthy man. He consistently disregards Usha's opinions, unilaterally dictating the course of her life and orchestrating her future according to his desire. Dorai's actions constitute a violation of Usha's fundamental right to make decisions regarding her own life. Ultimately, his callous and presumptuous behaviour undermines her aspirations and significantly disrupts her life.

Similarly, Mangalam's life trajectory is determined by her father. When her brother-in-law subjects her to sexual assault, her father fails to intervene. Rather than protecting her, he seeks to marry her off in an attempt to preserve the family's honour. His priorities lie with familial reputation rather than the well-being of his daughter. He shows no concern for Mangalam's aspirations; instead, he aims to remove what he perceives as a burden by facilitating her marriage, thereby denying her the opportunity to achieve her goals. The systemic violation of women's rights to make autonomous decisions is evident. The female characters in the play do not have the agency to lead their own lives or pursue their dreams; they are relegated to the status of mere pawns within a patriarchal framework. Family members fail to recognise that marriage is not the sole purpose of a woman's life, but rather one aspect of a broader existence.

Emotional, sexual, and physical abuse of women have a direct impact on their psychological well-being. The assault hampers their day-to-day life, and they begin to think that remaining mute, modest, and isolated would shield them from additional violence and accusations. This leads them to experience a sense of alienation from the

outside world and to lead lives that are empty and devoid of any purpose. Judith Herman characterised the feelings of traumatised victims that they feel "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation" (33). Their creativity and self-esteem are tampered with because they are made to believe that they are insignificant as a result of the continuous humiliation and criticism encountered by the men in the family. They feel inferior, which distances them from both society and their family. Their growth is stunted. Their lack of exposure to the outside world makes them feel worthless.

The unsavoury aspects of women's existence are hidden in the personal, "private life" (28). The value of seclusion in the home creates a barrier that hides the realities of women. They embrace a silence that encourages all forms of domestic and sexual exploitation since their main concerns are "public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief" (28). The victims of domestic abuse experience prolonged "wickedness, perversity, and weakness of will," (24) as a result of traumatic occurrences and the failure to expose it. They constantly feel numb and relive the traumatic event.

Domestic violence overwhelms victims' regular lives, leaves them feeling inadequate and perpetually keeps them in fear. As a result of their helplessness, the victims are unable to defend themselves or flee from the offenders because their attempts to do so would be futile since the culprits are part of their families. According to Janet, victims must "assimilate" and "liquidate" painful experiences to achieve a sense of "triumph" (qtd. in Herman 41). The victims can only create a new mental "scheme" for "understanding what has happened" by dealing with their trauma. However, if they are unable to overcome trauma, they must deal with lifelong changes that make them feel desperate and cause them to automatically enter a condition of submission. Victims who experience this altered state of consciousness "freeze" in the face of an attack (42).

The numbing response associated with surrender is known as constriction, which is one of the three types of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a key symptom of this condition. The inescapable danger "may evoke not only terror and range but also, paradoxically, a state of detached calm, in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve. Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings" (42-43). The self-defense mechanisms of victims can become overwhelmed and disorganised, leading them to surrender to their abusers and respond to the maltreatment with numbness. In this context, the character Mangalam becomes completely powerless and enters a state of surrender to avoid public humiliation and ridicule. Consequently, her "self-defense" mechanisms cease to function entirely (42). She does not resist her husband when he sexually and physically assaults her. The continuous cycle of domestic abuse renders her numb and distorted.

The victims, whose negative symptoms outweigh their positive ones, are doomed to a "diminished life, tormented by memory and bounded by helplessness and fear," and they feel as though a piece of them has died (49). The traumatic experiences keep the victims in a state of terror and insulate them from reality. Mangalam, as a victim of domestic violence, constantly experiences fear when she lives under her husband's surveillance, and it is only in his absence that she feels happy and independent. To perpetuate Mangalam's fear, her husband resorts to all kinds of tyranny to gain control and establish authority. The disgusting, violent, and dangerous life disrupts Mangalam's life.

The trauma undermines the integrity of interpersonal relationships. Traumatic experiences not only obliterate an individual's positive self-worth but also disrupt attachment systems and fundamental beliefs regarding the safety of the universe. This erosion can significantly diminish victims' faith in a "natural or divine order," subsequently placing them in an "existential crisis" (51). Trust serves as the foundational

virtue upon which relationships are built; the care derived from these connections fosters a belief that the world supports human existence. To maintain faith "in the continuity of life, the order of nature, and the transcendent order of the divine," one must possess trust (52). Following the molestation by her fiancé, Sumati experiences a profound loss of trust in relationships, leading her to avoid intimacy, as she "doesn't allow anyone to get close to her … to touch her" (48). Similarly, Mangalam's trust in others is compromised, as her family fails to protect her from abuse and subsequently fails to give the necessary support after the traumatic event.

Mangalam receives no support from her family following the sexual assault perpetrated by her brother-in-law. She experiences profound feelings of betrayal and injustice when her pleas for assistance are disregarded. Unfortunately, her suffering and trauma persist into her marriage, where she faces ongoing victimisation by her husband. This continual abuse shatters her hopes and jeopardises her sense of safety. Mangalam's circumstances might have improved had she been partnered with a compassionate and understanding spouse; however, the violation of her bodily integrity under the guise of marital relations further disempowers her. Judith Herman articulates this dynamic, stating, "thus the survivor's feelings of fear, distrust, and isolation may be compounded by the incomprehension or frank hostility of those to whom she turns for help. When the rapist is a husband or lover, the traumatized person is the most vulnerable of all, for the person to whom she might ordinarily turn for safety and protection is precisely the source of danger" (62-63).

However, the victims' loss of trust in others isolates them from all social bonds, resulting in experiences of alienation. They feel as though "they belong more to the dead than to the living" due to the loss of credibility (52). Social isolation can serve both as a deliberate tactic of emotional abuse and because of prolonged abuse. As a tactic, it is

employed to control and isolate the victim from their support networks, thereby rendering them more susceptible to manipulation and domination. Consequently, emotional abuse undermines the victim's self-confidence and relationships, prompting a withdrawal from social connections, which often exacerbates feelings of loneliness and entrapment. Mangalam exists as a hostage in her own home. To avoid her husband Dorai's nagging, accusations, and humiliation, she sacrifices her sense of self and distances herself from others. Similarly, following the traumatic incident, Sumati severs all social ties and isolates herself. Traumatic memories impede her ability to trust anyone, engendering suspicion toward others, and prompting her to eschew physical interactions. Outwardly, she may appear strong, but the scars left by the event instil in her a profound sense of unworthiness.

A secure sense of connection with caring individuals is fundamental to "personality development" (52). When this connection is fractured, the traumatised individual loses her basic sense of self. Physical and sexual abuse infringe upon the victims' autonomy at the level of fundamental bodily integrity, leading them to perceive their bodies as having been "invaded, injured, and defiled" (53). Mangalam feels that her body no longer belongs to her and perceives it as injured and defiled, resulting in a profound loss of autonomy and an overwhelming sense of shame. "Shame is an emotional response to helplessness, the violation of bodily integrity, and the indignity suffered in the eyes of another person" (53). In Sumati's case, she experiences guilt and shame for herself. When Vikram approaches Sumati to confess his love for her, she interrupts him, stating, "you will regret it …" (40). By employing the term 'regret' in this context, she implies that she is unworthy of Vikram's love because she believes she is unclean and damaged.

As a consequence of familial betrayal and the subsequent erosion of trust, victims often experience feelings of shame and guilt, leading to "pathological grief, disrupted

relationships, and chronic depression" (55-56). Inadvertently, some victims may exercise poor judgment and engage in self-destructive behaviours. Cathy Caruth, in her seminal work titled *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, articulates that certain traumatised individuals may initially respond with "suicide attempts" or other forms of "self-destructive behavior" (176).

Mangalam ultimately takes her own life by refusing to adhere to the medication prescribed for her illness, as she would prefer death over continuing her existence alongside her husband, Dorai. Following her death, she desires that he endure the pain and loneliness that she has experienced throughout their marital relationship. Mangalam frequently engages in fantasies of suicide. Trimerman posits that the wish for suicide represents a "sign of resistance and pride" and characterises it as an "attitude of absolute passivity" (qtd. in Herman 85). The playwright elucidates Mangalam's psychological state through the dialogue of Revathi, Mangalam's daughter-in-law, as illustrated in the following lines:

> REVATHI. (quietly now) She hated you too. She prayed every single day that she should die a sumangali. That she should die with a thali around her neck. When you got your first heart attack, she was so worried. So very worried. She went to the temple twice a day. She offered archana in your name and everybody said, what a holy woman, what a good wife. But there was nothing good or holy about it, oh no! Not at all! She wanted to die before you, so that you would suffer. Suffer as much as she did.
>
> DORAI. (to himself) Revenge! That's what she always wanted. Revenge!
>
> REVATHY. So she decided not to take any chance isn't it? ... How many of your sleeping pills did she swallows?

(silence)

REVATHY. How clever she was. She got fever, ordinary viral fever. Every house had somebody or the other down with it those days. But she made it worse for herself. she took no tablets to control the fever, she just let it go higher and higher, and that night, she must have swallowed the pills, when you were phoning the doctor.

DORAI. (to himself) She had arranged everything, planned everything.

REVATHY. She was so clever! Too clever for you! She even fooled the doctor, poor man, he was totally unsuspicious. Even with that high fever, her brain worked like a man's. (23)

Ordinary individuals, in contrast, are more prone to experience terror-related paralysis or social isolation during traumatic events, whereas individuals exhibiting high resilience are more likely to capitalise on opportunities for purposeful action. Sumathi, akin to Mangalam, isolates herself and avoids social interactions following her molestation by her fiancé. When Nari, her uncle, attempts to molest her a second time, she resists and reveals his brutality to others. She is determined never to lose control over her body and to avoid re-victimisation. Ultimately, Sumathi comes to accept that she is not invulnerable and develops a strong awareness of her ability to influence her destiny.

To facilitate the recovery of victims from trauma, it is imperative to restore their diminished confidence. Family members should provide support to the victim rather than attempting to silence them. Such assistance empowers the victim to confront trauma and rebuild trust. The restoration of trust is instrumental in enhancing self-confidence and facilitating a clearer understanding of their circumstances. Family dynamics often contribute to the victims' entanglement with traumatic memories, and they play a crucial

role in aiding recovery. In the play, Sumathi's family demonstrates unwavering support for her, thereby safeguarding her from revictimization and revealing the brutality inflicted by her uncle. Similarly, Anil's trust in his wife Sonali, who experienced sexual abuse in her childhood, as portrayed in the play *Getting Away with Murder*, exemplifies a supportive partnership. He refrains from controlling or perpetrating sexual violence against her, unlike Dorai's treatment of Mangalam. Instead, Anil seeks to understand Sonali and endeavours to regain her trust, ultimately succeeding in this endeavour. In stark contrast, Dorai's failure to earn Mangalam's trust is evident; he engages in a pattern of humiliation and criticism, exacerbating Mangalam's mental anguish.

The survivors struggle to cope with everyday life due to the betrayal they have experienced, the abuse they have endured, and the neglect they have faced, which causes them to freeze and isolate themselves from reality. They perceive distancing themselves from others as a means of protecting themselves from further hardships and abuse. In this context, individuals close to the survivor should actively encourage and support them in overcoming their trauma. They should serve as beacons of hope, assisting survivors in rebuilding their trust in others. Just as a creeper requires a support structure to grow in a proper direction, survivors require support to restart their lives. Judith Herman asserts that "if the survivor is lucky enough to have supportive family, lovers, or friends, their care and protection can have a strong healing influence" (63).

Poile Sengupta has demonstrated that the mistreatment of women is not an inherent aspect of societal norms but rather a construct of patriarchal systems. She further underscores that violence against women often manifests within the domestic sphere, as children observe and internalise the behaviours exhibited by their parents and surrounding adults. When children witness abusive dynamics between parental figures, they may adopt aggressive behaviours, which they later replicate in their own adult relationships. This

pattern of learned behaviour perpetuates across generations, thereby reinforcing a cyclical nature of violence within families. Sociologists have similarly contended that "men batter because they learned violence in their families as children and that women seek out abusive men because they saw their mother being abused" (McCue 13).

Mani, Dorai's son, often threatens his wife to be quiet and raises his hands to beat her.

> REVATHY. She's much more sensible than Usha, let me tell you Chitra knows what is what. She even knows why your sweet, innocent sister was sent away in her first P.U. to you grandmother's house shall I tell you why?
>
> MANI. Will you shut up or do you want me too….
>
> (Sound of high wailing in the street. Revathy flings herself out to the chair and onto the mat, head hanging down and sari tight like a shroud. Mani stills. Thangam, an elderly woman in widow's color enters, beating her breast). (2)

In this context, Mani acquires aggressive behaviour from his father, who consistently inflicts physical and emotional abuse on his wife. For Mani, domestic violence is not perceived as a violation of women's rights; rather, it is normalised within his household. Both Mani and Dorai are aware of the abuse Usha endures at the hands of her in-laws, yet they demonstrate a lack of concern and fail to provide her with emotional support. This is indicative of the patriarchal ideologies that have shaped their beliefs, which dictate that men are inherently aggressive and that women have a duty to endure such aggression. Throughout the play, Mangalam's sons neither oppose their father's violent behaviour nor defend their mother during these episodes of abuse. Similarly, Usha does not confront her husband or in-laws; instead, she passively accepts her circumstances, having been socialised to do so by observing her own mother's submissive response to her father's violence.

Women experience devaluation from childhood onward. The gender disparity among children fosters a belief that society is inequitable toward women, leading to the acceptance of the notion that violence against women is not a crime. Chodorow argues in his paper that gender discrimination is not genetically predetermined but arises from familial structures. He also emphasises that "women, universally, are largely responsible for early child care and for (at least) later female socialization" (qtd. in. Ortner 81). Thus, women consciously contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchy within society.

Women's adherence to patriarchal ideals, lack of awareness regarding their potential, and silence in the face of abuse serve as barriers to their success and visibility in society. They are no longer merely passive victims of violence; they also play a role in its perpetuation. For instance, Thangam is aware that her husband raped her sister, Mangalam, yet she does not act against him or defend her sister when she faces accusations and criticism from others. To protect her marital life and uphold the family's honour, Thangam betrays her sister by remaining silent about the incident. Mangalam's passive response to her husband's abusive behaviour contributes to the continuation of the cycle of violence for over three decades.

Social norms are often unacceptable to women and disproportionately favour men; women are compelled to adhere to these norms without any question due to their upbringing. Many victims fear escaping from abusive relationships, finding themselves caught in a profound dilemma. While being in a relationship can be positive, such relationships must foster harmony for both individuals involved. If one partner dominates or discriminates against the other by disregarding their feelings, the relationship can become detrimental. An androcentric society compels women to conform to established rules and norms, which instils in them a belief in their own inferiority and a sense of

obligation to serve men. This mindset leads women to perceive themselves as sexual objects primarily tasked with satisfying male desires. Moreover, men often seek to maintain women's fearfulness; this dynamic persists as many women accept their positions, subsequently imposing these beliefs on future generations, as illustrated in the dialogue between Revathy and Thangam.

> REVATHY. (to Dorai) Do you know the way they talk in the kitchen? You should hear them. Such vulgar language! 'If you don't stir the milk when it boils, your child will be born deformed. If you fill water in a glass till it spills over, your husband will sleep with another woman.'
>
> THANGAM. Fear makes people remember. A woman who is afraid will never go wrong.
>
> REVATHY. (back to Thangam) So you want me to be afraid is it? You want me to sit in the kitchen, with my head hanging down. You don't want me to dress well, or talk to anybody, or smile at anyone. Just sit in one corner and be afraid.
>
> THANGAM. A woman who opens her mouth and smiles at men, will also open her legs. (22)

Here, the conversation between the two ladies shows that the patriarchal system makes women internalise that they are the weaker sex and restricted to sexual freedom as men have in society. the society wants women to be always in a state of fear, since only then will they not commit mistakes.

Women often remain in abusive relationships due to complex emotional entanglements. Many do not leave their partners out of concern for their children's futures and fear of societal repercussions associated with separation. Christy-Dale L. Sims, in her

article “Invisible Wounds, Invisible Abuse: The Exclusion of Emotional Abuse in Newspaper Articles,” articulates that women frequently stay in violent relationships because of a “lack of economic and/or social resources, a desire to remain with their children, or greater fear of leaving than of staying, particularly in light of threats made by the abuser” (382).

Mangalam, for instance, could potentially exit her abusive relationship, yet she chooses to remain, primarily because she must provide for her children and has been raised under the traditional belief that a woman should not leave her husband’s house until her death. She lacks the knowledge or tools to oppose her husband and endures her situation without question. This societal conditioning, which teaches women to tolerate difficulties within marriage, is poignantly illustrated by Sonali in Dina Mehta’s play *Getting Away With Murder*, where she reflects her mother’s perspective that “just as a scorpion enjoys stinging people with all the pent-up venom in its tail” (86). Society often blames women without understanding the intricacies of their circumstances, the root causes of their struggles, or the challenges they face. Instead, there is a tendency to defame and oppress women in various ways, with little regard for the profound pain they endure.

Demolishing the patriarchal system within the family unit is essential for eradicating violence against women in the domestic sphere. Both men and women must be educated to respect one another. Boys should be taught to treat women with dignity, while women should be encouraged to resist the abuse directed at them and to cultivate resilience. In the play, Sumati and Usha realise that remaining silent and enduring abuse will ultimately jeopardise their lives; consequently, they choose to resist their offenders. Sumati confronts the malevolence of her uncle by refusing to submit to him, thereby exposing his wrongdoing to her family. Conversely, Usha makes the courageous decision

to leave her husband, as she refuses to live in an estranged relationship. She returns to her home in search of autonomy and self-respect.

The violence that transpires within private spaces must be brought to light by women, as it has transcended the realm of personal matters. Women ought to challenge prevailing stereotypes and articulate the brutality they have experienced. In the play *Getting Away With Murder*, the character Razia articulates a significant truth: "By identifying Man as the villain we have won our fight for equality. The enemy is within, don't you see? It is our minds, … that we are underlings!" (78). C. S. Lakshmi's insights further reinforce Razia's assertion:

> Family violence is a most dangerous killer because it is a secret killer. It is kept secret because we are ashamed, turn silent, lose our voices when it is around. But we must remember that it can maim, not just physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually – for life. It has taken too many lives, too many voices … We have to learn not to keep quiet, to speak for all our survivals, to help clarify this disease, to help heal, reaffirm all our lives, our existence, our art. (qtd. in Sivapriya 126)

Individuals should have access to quality education and economic freedom. Conversely, men must cease employing violence as a means to exert control over women, which contributes to their distress. It is imperative to break the cycle of violence within families and to perceive women through a humanistic lens rather than through a sexist perspective. Instead of perpetrating abuse, men should leverage their positions of power to support and nurture women. Furthermore, men ought to cultivate respect for women and girls and recognise that gender roles are socially constructed and, therefore, inherently unnatural.