

HOMO SACER: GENDER PERFORMATIVITY, HONOUR AND VIOLENCE IN PAAVA KADHAIGAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a critical reading of the South Asian anthology film *Paava Kadhaigal*. It focuses on the thorny relationship between gender performativity, honour and violence. A central assertion of this paper is that the transgender and female characters in the film are forced to play out socially constructed gender roles. Therefore, when these characters are not able to meet or even fail to live up to the severe gender expectations presented by society, they fall into being Homo Sacer in Giorgio Agamben's definition. Their bare life is a product of the threat they are seen to pose to the honour of families, which casts them as abject entities requiring elimination through violence or, in some cases, an act known today by its Sudanese name, honour killing. In addition, the paper argues that such marginal characters are not objects of mourning or grievability. It builds on Judith Butler's examination of the politics of grief to make this claim. However, their very lives, considered ungrievable, show the reality of being a scapegoat. Such elements are seen as expendable. They must be eliminated in order that honour may return to the family and society. *Paava Kadhaigal* both reflects and condemns the deep-rooted societal norms of honour, gender identity, and violence.

Keywords: Gender, Violence, Honour, Homo Sacer, and Mourning.



Introduction

Researchers have studied the role of violence in movies and media, looking at its effects on various aspects of society. Studies have proven that bad media influences people, causing issues such as fighting, stereotyping and taking chances (Groves et al. 106). Also, scenes of sex and violence in movie previews can make viewers enjoy them more by giving them a sense of increased suspense or humour (Oliver et al. 65). TV and movie violence make kids more aggressive in the long run as well as in the short term (Huesmann 44). When movies and TV have abundant violence, people exhibit stored emotions and pay more attention (Riddle 9). In addition, the way media shows violence between people could cause viewers to become more aggressive (Huesmann and Malamuth 65). Also, how the media portrays violent scenes can change viewers' ability to identify whether something is real or just imagination (Brown 17). This has a more significant impact on what the audience receives. However, showing violence against weak and powerless people in media can help viewers understand the troubles faced by these victims. This is especially important when such matters are still not widely discussed. *Paava Kadhaigal* is one such film anthology that depicts stories of honour killing and gender-based violence

where transgender people and females are victimised.

In *Paava Kadhaigal*, the representation of transgender and female characters reveals how rigid rules of gender performance are oppressive in society. This article goes deep into this discussion, arguing that the simple lives of these people are tied up with being seen as a threat to family dignity. Using Gergio Agamben's idea of "Homo Sacer", we argue that the victims in the films are targetted because they are considered as a threat to the stability of the standards laid by the society and thus eliminating the threat through violence provides the perpetrator with a sense of cleansing the unclean from the society, yet in the process, the fundamental human rights of the victims are neglected, and they are considered as bare life.

Gender-Based Violence in India

Gender-based violence in India is a multifaceted and widespread problem firmly ensconced by many aspects of society. For instance, in North Karnataka, 24 % of women sex workers have been severely assaulted by an intimate partner related to factors such as financial dependence and alcohol use (Javalkar et al.76). Nationally, the statistics are alarming: A crime against women is committed every three minutes; 70 % of Indian women are victims of domestic violence, and 38 % in India admit to

physically beating their partners (Rai 23). This violence is not just a matter of individual responsibility, but it has also taken root on the level of state and community responses. Muslim women, in particular, are affected by this form of violence in both India and Britain (Chantler et al. 7).

During armed conflicts, women face even higher risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Women from the state are often targeted, while communities remain indifferent to their unique circumstances (Kujur 21). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these problems (Markan et al. 59). Previous gender imbalances and economic disruptions have increased violence against girls. Indeed, gender-based violence is by no means limited to women. In rural Haryana, 52.4 % of men were victims (Malik 76). The primary form was emotional abuse. Gender violence in India is located within a nonlegal, nondominant liminal space. It exists on the margins of law as bare life (Dey 2). The educational background of the person concerned is also important in terms of how violent he or she will be. Well-educated men and women are less likely to practice violence (Simister and Makowiec 34). However, despite the magnitude of gender-based violence, only 2 % of affected women go to formal sources (Palermo et al.). This underreporting is reinforced by low awareness among young

women studying at college about the meaning of gender-based violence and their legal rights (Ajan et al. 54). In sum, gender-based violence in India is a complex problem. It runs through the very grain of society and has repercussions not only for individuals' health but also for social norms and legal frameworks.

Violence against Transgenders in India

The landscape for transgender people in India is one replete with violence and discrimination. In particular, transgender women suffer a high level of discrimination, such as intimate partner violence, suicidality and low social support (Jesus et al. 418). Shaw et al. found the pervasiveness of sexual violence against transgender people in Karnataka to be 18 % this past year. This violence is often caused by pervasive stigma arising from their marginalised social identities. Their vulnerability to HIV is increased at multiple levels (Ganju and Saggurti 903). This violence is not trivial, however. Trans people are fifty times more likely to contract HIV because of the stigma and discrimination they face (Ghoshal and Knight 21-32). They suffer significant health inequalities, including a higher risk of violence and harassment as well as psychological problems (Monteiro et al. 14). Kinds of gender-based violence experienced by transgender women in India include those found in education, healthcare and interactions with the police



(Lanham et al. 37-46). Experiences of victimisation are related to increased sexual risk behaviour (Willie et al. 121).

The problem is even more complicated by the fact that nearly 16.7 % of transgender persons in India have been victims of sexual violence within just three months (Sinha et al. 4). Violence toward transgender people is most commonly experienced when they are seen to violate gender norms (Jauk 807-825). Among those studied, more than half suffered some harassment or violence. One-fourth experienced a violent incident (Lombardi et al. 101-89). Thus, violence against the transgender community in India is a significant public health concern and human rights abuse involving systemic discrimination as well as widespread social stigma. This violence affects every aspect of their lives, life and health. Therefore, immediate integrated intervention is required.

Violence against Women

In India, sexual violence against women is a serious problem at the root of the structures of society and cultural expectations. In India, the prevalence of spousal intimate partner violence is 31.3 per 100,00 women, with a higher rate among less developed states (34.5 %) than those that are more advanced in development (26.7%) (Kumar et al. 43). According to Babu and Kar, the prevalence of sexual violence against women in

Eastern India as a whole is 16 %. However, men report higher rates of all forms of violence except this one. In North Karnataka, 24 % of women who had sex for money reported recent severe physical and sexual violence by their partners. This was influenced directly (for example, male financial support) and indirectly (use or lack thereof of alcohol by the respondent). Rape and sexual abuse are among the most common forms of violence against women in India (Du Mont and White, 24). Safety, avoidance and empowerment are the various methods applied by women in India to respond both to fear of sexual violence itself and its consequences (Nieder et al. 12).

A third of Indian women are a victim of spousal violence. Physical assault is the most prevalent form, accounting for 27.4 % (Krishnamoorthy et al. 76). Marital rape, a controversial topic in India (Bali), affects about 75 % of married women. Sexual violence against women has become a means of social control for marginalised groups. It is certainly fueled by the rise of Hindu supremacy and repressive ideals about Indian masculinity that consign women to the domestic sphere (Manian). Thus, sexual violence against women is a severe problem in India; it spans the social classes and needs immediate attention as well as drastic measures.

Gender Performativity: Expectation of the Society

In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender is not something which we inherently are born with, but it is constructed through daily practices through the social norms, and the repetition of these acts is what builds gender. She argues that gender is “an act, as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (222), which underscores that Gender is not a fixed identity. However, it is developed and shown through utterance patterns over time. Butler opines that we are not born with a gender identity, stating, “There would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction” (216). She further elaborates, “Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (68), underscoring the notion that gender is a process rather than a static state. The concept of gender performativity holds the view that a person has the ability to transform his/her gender into any other gender. Butler argues that gendered actions are bound to be repeated over time, and when they are not repeated in the expected way, it disrupts the fragility of

these constructs. Butler also exposes that the identity of being a gendered individual is a “politically tenuous construction” (214) and is very susceptible to change. In this alleged situation, gender is no longer assumed to be an individual’s sole and defining identity; it will be determined by their cultural, social, religious, and personal beliefs.

World Health Organisation elucidates that sex is about the physical nature of men and women. On the other hand, gender is how society thinks men and women should act, what they do, and how they think. This explanation of gender by WHO clearly states that the meaning of gender has evolved with the norms and expectations of society. Gender roles vary in terms of cultural and traditional practices across the world. The problem arises when an individual steps out of this constructed and expected gender performance. Consequently, the individual is treated as an outcast or a criminal. *Paava Kadhaigal* distinctively reveals the state of individuals who break societal gender stereotypes and the horrific consequences they face from society.

In the anthology, the film “Thangam” explains the atrocities against the transgender community in India during the 1980s. Sathaar, a transgender person who aims to be a transexual in the course of the film, is a direct victim of abusive gender expectations. Sathaar is ill-treated,



insulted, and harassed by his own family, villagers that expose the transphobic nature of society. He is seen as a blot on the community. His father thrashes him for sleeping between his sisters and wearing cosmetics and sarees. Even his utmost affection towards his childhood friend Saravanan is disgusting in the eyes of society. The peak of injustice arises when his sister and friend are repented and welcomed by the villagers and family after their elopement, whereas Sathaar is pushed to death for helping them. This injustice is a result of Sathaar's failure to fulfil the gender roles expected by society.

The film "Love Panna Uttranum" of the anthology voices out the freedom of relationships of individuals irrespective of their caste, religion and gender. The twin sisters, Jothilaskhmi and Aadhilaskhmi, raised by an orthodox father, are expected to fulfil their father's wishes as obedient daughters. The film sheds light on society's upbringing of daughters, where they are viewed as a symbol of obedience, womanhood and trust. The glorification of daughters by society is an indirect method of oppression. Moreover, the film reveals the denial of women's choice in marriage. Ostor and Fruzzetti, researchers, examine wedding ceremonies and customs for women as a way to show how women's areas were given rituals and had their place organised lower. This pushed women from the public world of men and

power. When the father discovers the love affair of Aadhilakshmi, he kills his daughter. This murder is a manipulation of societal pressures and gendered expectations of a daughter. The father is manipulated to murder Jothilakshmi, discovering that she is a lesbian. The father's attitude represents Indian parenthood that never allows same-sex relationships and inter-caste marriage. The film focuses on the psyche of Indian society that firmly strangles the woman's choice in relationships.

The next film, "Vaanmagal", revolves around a family suffering from the consequences of sexual harassment on Ponnuthaayi, the youngest kid of the family. Though the film exposes the sad reality of child harassment and its aftermath, it also reveals the expectations of society on a girl child when she enters into the adolescent period. Mathi, the family's mother, instructs the elder daughter, Vaidehi, about her body. Mathi refers to a woman's body as a temple that is to be treated with care, protection, sacredness and purity. She goes on to list out the dos and don'ts of her daughter, which exhibits the discrimination towards women in society. Mathi, the mother, represents Indian society that reflects a woman's anticipations and behaviour roles. Mathi's narrow-mindedness elevates when she lowers her daughter Ponnuthaayi as a criminal rather than a

victim of child abuse. Mathi, as well as her husband Satya, lashes at their son Bharath for failing his assigned gender duty in protecting his sister from the abuse.

The film 'Oor Iravu' is a story similar to the subject of "Love Panna Utranum", where both highlight caste politics and honour-killing. "Oor Iravu" again puts forth the tragic end of an independent daughter, Sumathi, who fails to play the role of a submissive daughter to her caste-fanatic father. Sumathi faces animosity and adversity at the time of pregnancy from her siblings for stepping out of her home and standing in her shoes as an independent individual.

Honour-based violence in India

Honour-based violence in India is an extremely sensitive issue, characterised by its brutality and widespread impact. Patel notes that "honour-based violence in India is on the rise, with young citizens being killed for exercising their democratic right to choose their life partners" (Patel 8). This violence predominantly affects women who choose life partners against accepted social mores; as Vishwanath and Palakonda observe: "Honour crimes in India are a widespread and brutal form of violence" (66). Men also experience high rates of honour-related violence, with Broom et al. reporting a lifetime prevalence of 99.7% for Indian men (53). True includes honour killings among the most frequent forms of violence against women and girls

in India (56). Pathak and Rai emphasise that honour killings in India mainly focus on women, carried out "to satisfy patriarchal society's ego and affect the marriage prospects of other female members of the family" (87).

Singhal describes the perception of women in these crimes, stating that they are "considered objects and commodities, not as human beings endowed with dignity and rights" (Singhal 32). The registered cases of honour killing in India increased ninefold in 2015 compared to 2014, primarily among Hindu and Muslim families in Northern states (Sharma). Mangoli and Anchan suggest that media representation of honour violence in India may indirectly ignite fear and set examples for challengers of cultural ideologies and customs (Mangoli and Anchan). Sneha et al. argue that laws alone are not sufficient to curb honour killings in India, and these must be addressed as a sociological issue (Sneha et al.). According to UNPF, about 5000 women and girls are killed each year through honour killings, and the estimated amount, by some other non-governmental organisations, may go up to 20,000 (D'Lima et al.). In northern Indian states, at least 900 murders in the name of "honour" occur every year (Round Up).

In *Paava Kathaigal*, gender-based violence is committed against the characters to preserve the honour of the family. The key theme in all the episodes of



the anthology is honour. In Indian society, the family's honour is believed to lie in guarding the female. When honour is at stake, to rectify the family honour, the family has to eliminate the one who is responsible for the family's dishonour. In the films, the characters Ponnuthaayi (Vaan Magal), Sumathi (Oor Iravu), Sathar (Thangam), and Jothilakshmi (Love et al.) are victims of honour killing and gender-based violence. Each is either killed or attempted to be killed to preserve the honour of the family.

The film "Thangam" reflects the transphobic mindset of Indian society that beholds transgender people as a curse to society. Sathar, the transgender in the film, is the victim of this transphobia and is pushed to death by his own family. His family and society reject him due to his trans behaviour. As Warner points out, family members often reject transgender people due to transphobia. This was part of a system of abuse when someone's honour is based on gender roles and views on how relationships should be. Family actions are a way to handle the situation when a trans person does not follow what is expected of gender roles and standards set by society (3). Anybody spending time with Sathar is also criticised for his/her company with the transgender. The goons in the village harass him, stating that he has placed the village's honour at stake due to his behaviour. From the perspective

of society, Sathar is a criminal who offended the reputation of gender, family, community, and village. He turns out to be the sole reason for collapsing society's honour. This dishonour caused by Sathar rages the family and villagers, leading to his tragic end. The death of Sathar moves the audience to tears when his mother pleads with him to finish off his life in order to save his family's honour. This action of his mother sheds light on the significance of protecting honour by killing one's own child.

The film "Love Panna Uttranum" exposes the influence of caste politics relating to honour killings in India. The story revolves around the stories of twin sisters Aadhilakshmi and Jothilakshmi, who choose their life partners despite hailing from an orthodox and traditional background. Usually, honour crime is done by a father or the brother of a woman when they suspect her of having a physical relationship with other men before her marriage or out of marriage (Welchman 5). When the father learns the relationship of Aadhilakshmi with his driver, he is manipulated to kill his daughter in the name of preserving 'honour'. On the other hand, he is shocked to encounter Jothilakshmi as a lesbian and decides to murder her as well. As the film's title states, society must let go of individuals in choosing their partners belonging to any religion, caste, and gender rather than killing them in the

name of honour. Jothilakshmi escapes honour killing by making her father realise that feelings are primary and honour is secondary. The film exhibits that caste politics plays a significant role in honour killings that draw society backwards.

The film "Vaanmagal" displays the honour killing of child abuse victims. Ponnuthaayi, the youngest kid of Satya-Mathi, is sexually harassed. The entire family endures the pain of harassment that happened to Ponnuthayi. The parents avoid filing complaints despite identifying the criminal in order to save the family's honour. The mother of Ponnuthaayi incessantly reflects her disgust towards her daughter after the incident. Instead of providing moral support to the kid, she stops her schooling for many days. When a girl becomes mature, she is expected to consider the shame associated with womanhood, which makes it hard for her to be proud of her own body (Nabar 87). Mathi instils this idea of femininity among her girl children, warning them to protect their bodies as a temple. Mathi's attitude drives her mad when she is preoccupied with her daughter being impure after the harassment. She forcefully bathes Ponnuthayi frequently despite her ill health. She hides the incident from society to safeguard her family's honour instead of punishing the criminal by law. The obsession with family honour even tempts Mathi to kill Ponnuthayi, but she rightly gets

back, realising that it may lead to a significant loss in her family. The film 'Vanmagal' serves as a mirror of Indian society, which disowns the victims but not the criminals.

The film 'Oor Iravu' is the most breathtaking film of *Paava Kathaigal* in sounding the tribulations of honour killing related to inter-caste marriage. The film begins with the ongoing arrangements of Sumathi's baby shower by her father, Janakiraman. Sumathi, an IT professional, married Hari of another caste against her family. Janakiraman reconciles with his daughter after a couple of years of knowing Sumathi's pregnancy. He takes her along with him to the village to conduct a baby shower, informing Hari. The story takes a twist on the previous night of the function, where Janakiraman poisoned Sumathi. He unmasks his cruelty by stating that he does not want her daughter, as well as the foetus from another lineage. The greatest threat to this honour lies in the woman, in her body, and due to her reproducing and procreating capacity (Chowdhary 16-17). Janakiraman is the symbol of the brutality of honour killing that can empty a man's mind and heart, draining him of knowledge and emotions. His ruthlessness peaks in killing the unborn baby in order to preserve his family's reputation. The depiction of Sumathi's death trembles the audience and unveils the horrors of honour killing. The film ends with Hari fighting against



Janakiraman by law. Though Janakiraman is released due to lack of evidence, Hari further appeals to prove the guilty. The act of Hari brings a ray of hope in marking an end to the evils of honour killing.

Tools of Purification: Subjective, Symbolic and Systemic Violence

Individuals who do not conform to the social norms of gender face severe punishment in several societies. Heilman and Wallen note that “men and women who violate gender norms are penalised, with men being characterised as more ineffectual and afforded less respect, and women being more interpersonally derogated and disliked” (664). This shows a societal trend where gender-based violence often goes unpunished and neglected, therefore creating an unjust and precarious environment, especially for women (Chitkara et al. 1). In their article, Baumeister and Vohs reveal the way in which the societal norms of gender roles contribute to the gender asymmetries that exist in various interactions, such as prostitution, courtship, and infidelity, among others (339-363). Caleo says that females and males are evaluated differently based on organisational justice laws that mimic generalised beliefs. So, reward recommendations for females and males would vary based on gender conformity (1422-1435). Transgender people are primarily targeted for violence when society tries to fix conventional

gender boundaries, which leads to profound psychosocial impacts and mental trauma (Burdge 243-250). Ridgeway shows that when people believe specific ideas about gender status, they respond with approval or disapproval. This affects assertive women leaders who do not match expected roles and makes it harder for them to get others to follow orders or do things. (637). Thus, historically, people who violate gender norms are penalised.

Violence is a concept that is not only physical, but it is also present at the symbolic level as well against systemic norms. According to Ruez, Žižek describes three forms of violence: subjective, symbolic, and systemic (154). He prefers a violent form of fight with daily differences between individuals to go against the set norms. According to Mota, Žižek argues that violence can be constructive through it as a space for new events. However, he fails to identify between antagonism and agonistic pacifism. Hannah Arendt argues that violence for instrumental gains is not a good approach; it is better to see it as a tool for revolutionising the current set-up of things (Finlay 29). According to Arendt, violence is a lateral property since it is amongst the two poles. The nature of it has to be such that it is the means to an end but not the end itself (Manograsso 38). The core idea of Judith Butler is that any form of distinguishing genders through the process of categorising them under a

specific sexual type (male or female) can be regarded as violence. Butler discusses two types of military actions: one that is violent and the other that is not. (Karhu). Furthermore, Butler's work on norms and normalisation helps one understand the limitations of legal rights frameworks for addressing harms created by racialised and gendered systems of control (Spade 40).

The idea of treating those who violate gender norms in India is connected to the idea of impurity and abject. In her book "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection," Julia Kristeva looks at how Indians think about abject things. She looks at the idea of abjection in Indian society. She mainly focuses on the caste system and rituals linked with it. Kristeva says India's robust social class system makes up for the balance between men and women created by arranged marriages in Indian culture. She talks about how people in different groups are kept apart in the following manner: "The pure/impure opposition takes in the area that, with us, is governed by the good/evil opposition, the boundary at issue is related, through the hierarchy of caste and matrimonial regulations that accompany and secure it" (48). This is done through ceremonies of separation, refusal and disgust, making individuals or teams feel destructive towards each other. Kristeva also points out the strong link between sex and

symbols in Indian culture. This connection is based on splitting words, sexes and languages apart from each other. Her study helps one see the problematic relations of disgust in how people think in India. The order built on what is clean and not clean takes over the difference between men and women. It changes the evil acts of sacrifice into the practice of getting rid of dirt and polluted things. This system allows one to face filth in a planned way, but it might stop one from changing one's social status and could confuse being our selves with following the rules of messiness. Indian society balances differences in sexuality and makes divisions in symbolism bigger and smaller. In the anthology, violence is considered as a means to eliminate the unclean. The concept of honour is closely associated with being clean in Indian society. When the standards are violated, the characters tend to eliminate the dirt through violence, most of the time by killing the one who holds the blemish.

In his 2008 work, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek sorts them into two types. One is direct and easy-to-see physical attacks, called subjective violence. The other hides in language and common rules of society, which he calls symbolic violence. A third version that's hidden also exists in how governments or economic structures work — this last one we know as systemic



violence. Žižek's study goes deep into the links between different types of violence and how they are viewed in society. It highlights that sometimes hidden forms, like systemic and symbolic ones, can be very harmful. His work makes us think more about how we see and deal with violence in our world.

In "Thangam", Sathaar undergoes subjective violence. From the beginning of the film, Sathaar is physically abused. In the first scene, where Sathaar tries to get into the ration, he is beaten by the crowd and sent back. Moreover, he is chased by a gang of four men who physically abuse him on the street. Here, it shows that since he is transgender, he is treated below human. Moreover, another instance of physical violence is evident when Sahira, the sister of Sathaar, is caught wearing a saree. Sathaar claims it was his saree, but his father exerts his physical force on him and kicks him on the floor to buy the saree. In all three instances, Sathaar is physically abused because he is transgender. He is not allowed to be in the same queue because he is transgender. When Sathaar, a transgender person, gets into the queue of women, he is beaten, and when Sathaar, as a transgender person, goes on the street, the prime reason for the gang to chase and attack him is because of the reason that he is acting like a woman. The father beats Sathaar because he wants to wear a saree. Moreover, Sathaar is beaten

by his father even when he is sleeping near his sisters because he is transgender. To sum up, Sathaar undergoes constant violence because of the gender he has chosen.

Sathaar is given violent treatment when Saravanan and Sahira elope. Sathaar is again beaten and thrown out of the house by his father. Another violence done to Sathaar is his job is put at stake when Saravanan's father gets all the rations cards from him and throws them in the streets. Thus, Sathaar is pushed into a state of vulnerability where he cannot even get food and shelter. Further, he is molested and chased by the gang of four men, and his fate is unknown after that, which indirectly reveals that Sathaar might be dead because of the violence committed against him by the four men. In all these instances, Sathaar is assaulted just because he is transgender. Thus, violence is done to him because of his gender preference and performance. In other films, violence is done to the characters because they violate gender norms. Sathaar's sister Sahira is punished by her father as she does not obey his father by breaking her gender norms. In Thangam, the expected norm to be followed by the females is to obey the Parents. Further, the idea of retaining purity through honour killing is also the reason for the parents of both Saravanan

and Sahira searching for them to kill. This shows why Sahira's father wants to kill her.

In "Vaanmagal", the character Ponnuthaayi is raped by Dhanasekar, a senior of her brother Bharath. The actual target is Vaidehi, the elder sister of Ponnuthaayi. In Vaanmagal, the violation of gender norms is happening by becoming impure. Ponnuthaayi's mother's obsession with purity, which is revealed in her words, "your body is like a temple" (25:33), refrains in her actions of cleaning Ponnuthaayi's body again and again. When strangers rape Ponnuthaayi, for her mother, it becomes a violation of gender norms: that is, her carelessness to take care of her purity. Thus, according to her mother, Ponnuthaayi becomes impure, and to get rid of the impurity, the only way her mother knows is to kill her by throwing her from a mountain. Her mother does that at the end of the film in the imagination. The perpetrators' further plan to kidnap Vaidehi's mother (24:08) also reveals their plan to do violent deeds to women further. All the violence, including rape and honour killing, is done only to the female because they fail to follow the gender rules prescribed to them.

In "Love Panna Uttranum", the violence is done only to the females as they violate the gender norms prescribed to them. The father of Jothilakshmi and Aadhilakshmi kills Jothilakshmi because she loves someone lower than her status.

Further, Aadhilakshmi is also threatened to be killed by her father because of their assumed love affair between Aadhilakshmi and Barani. Here, violence serves as a cure for the impurity that happened because of the mix of two castes. Therefore, Jothilakshmi is killed by her father. Moreover, Aadhilakshmi is also attempted to be killed because it removes the dirt fallen on family honour.

In "Oor Iravu", Sumathi is given poison by her own father as she is disobedient and marries a person from another community, presumably from a lower caste. In order to purify the blame fallen on the family's honour, the father acts as if he is going to conduct a Bangle Wearing Ceremony for Sumathi. The father is so violent that he even drags Sumathi by her hair and pushes her into a room. In fact, not only is Sumathi killed, but her offspring comes as a result of the amalgamation of Sumathi and her lower-caste husband. Thus, by eradicating Sumathi through violence, her father tries to bring back the purity of the family. The murder of Sumathi is not immediately done but slowly, painfully done. Sumathi's father knows very well that she is dying, yet he waits patiently for her to die, thus inflicting pain on his daughter for the crime she has committed. Sumathi feels like choking and is not able to breathe. She groans in pain and vomits blood, yet her father does not reveal the truth that he has given her



poison in the fear that if they know the truth, they may save her. He even pushes her from the state of vulnerability to helplessness by not bringing her to the hospital. Moreover, Sumathi is violently dragged into a room while she cries, "Dad, Please. It hurts" (10:30). Thus, because of the reason that she is disobedient and violated her gender norms by being disobedient to her father, Sumathi is punished. Further, her father sees her death as a way of cleansing the dirt on her family made by Sumathi.

Symbolic violence is a subtle way society uses to humiliate and hurt the deviants through language. Throughout Thangam, Sathaar is ill-treated and berated with words. The four men who chase him ask, "What do you call the number between eight and ten?" and reply, "You call it Sathaar!" (27:29 - 27:34). Such remarks are derogatory and violent. Moreover, Sathaar is called a pimp by the villagers (7:45). Moreover, Sathaar is called using the pronoun 'it' rather than using 'he' (06:34 - 06:30). The act of calling Sathaar 'it' reveals the symbolic violence where he is considered as human rather an animal. The father of Sumathi also uses derogatory words such as "low-born baby" (09:23) to denote the child of Sumathi. Slavoj Žižek delineates that systemic violence is the major problem caused by the normal economic and political systems and the violence found in everyday life,

keeping the normative as it is. He defines systemic violence as ultra-objective yet responsible for "the 'automatic' creation of excluded and dispensable individuals" (22). It denotes the inherent rules embedded in the society that create othering. Sathaar, as a transgender person, experiences systemic violence throughout the film. The ration shop where Sathaar stands does not have a separate queue for transgender people. The system is oppressive to Sumathi also. Since Sumathi marries a person from a caste lower than hers, she is considered the curse of the family by all her relatives, including her father. The systemic violence is also evident in the case of Ponnuthayi. When Ponnuthaayi is raped by the seniors of his brother, her mother, Mathi, blames Ponnuthaayi for her carelessness as it is her duty to take care of her body. The notion of honour based on chastity itself is systemic. Another instance of systemic violence is evident in "Love Panna Uttranum", where Adhilakshmi is killed because she loves a man from another caste. Thus, systemic violence is manifested through the notion of honour. The anthology, in fact, brings out the systemic violence in the society that destroys the deviants.

Homo Sacer

In his work, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben has talked about "Bios" and

“Zoe” and distinguishes between two forms of life: Bios, which is political and social living including identification and power in a group; and Zoe, showing simple biological life with no unique identity or rules. Agamben’s ideas of “Homo Sacer” and “bare life” are directly linked to human rights abuse and turning people into objects. When a person is seen as “Homo Sacer”, he is deprived of rights and can be hurt or even harmed by anyone without any penalties. This reveals that their human rights are at stake. The idea of “Homo Sacer”, a sacred man, is also tied to purity. As Agamben explains, “it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred” (70) because “It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide” (70). In other words, anyone can kill those who is termed as “Homo Sacer” and escape the punishment because the victim is considered an impure deviant, one who is to be eliminated from society. In the process, the man/woman’s human rights are violated, and s/he is relegated to the position of bare life without any social value. The lives of the victims of gender-based violence in the anthology are also considered as bare lives by the perpetrators.

Sathaar, in the film “Thangam”, is treated as a “Homo Sacer” by the society. From the beginning of the film, he faces human rights violations. He is not even

treated like a human; he is instead considered below human because of his gender. In the ration shop, Sathaar is humiliated by the crowd, and Saravanan’s father also reprimands him not to stay in his shop (28:01-28:12). The ill-treatment from both places clearly shows that he is not treated as a human or at least equal to others. In another scene (27:39), Sathaar is further humiliated and teased by four men, but no one supports Sathaar. Sathaar’s words, “Even Sahira can go alone in the dark, but I can not” (17:23), further illuminate the fact that transgender people like Sathaar are poorly treated in society and the precarious environment the society has created for them. When Sathaar is cast away from his home by his father, he is pushed into a helpless state from a vulnerable state. Sathaar’s life is considered bare even by his mother, as she says, “Go die for their sake, Sathaar!” (7:29). No one cares who is chasing him and the precarity Sathaar faces. This also shows he is considered as a bare life, a “Homo Sacer”. No one even stops the men who kill Sathaar. Aathilakshmi is also killed in “Love Panna Uttranum” by her own father and the hooligans around him, yet they are left unpunished. Aathilakshmi is treated as a bare life as no one considers her right to live a basic human right. Ponnuthaayi is also considered impure by her mother and thought to be killed as a way to eliminate the bad remark on their



family. When Sumathi's father kills her and her baby, he is not punished. The whole act of killing Sumathi is considered cleansing as she is conceived with a low-born baby. The stillborn baby is also considered a bare life, deprived of any rights. In this manner, Sathaar, Aathilakshmi, Ponnuthaayi, and Sumathi are treated as "Homo Sacer".

In her book *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Judith Butler talks about how only certain lives become worthy of mourning. She looks into why some lives are seen as important and sad to lose while others are not considered worthy of sadness. Butler looks at how violence is shown and how it affects people. Butler states, "If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense." (6) In Butler's view the lives that are un-grievable are not even considered lives. She also discusses why some feelings and moral judgments are allowed while others are not.

Similarly, in *Paava Kadhaigal* certain lives are considered un-grievable, unworthy of mourning. Sathaar's life is un-grievable as no one cares or mourns for his death; the un-grievability is the result of his gender. As he is transgender, not even his mother mourns his death. Instead, they are happy that he is dead. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler discusses how

sadness is connected to hurting people. She looks into the ban on feeling sad and its link to violence that leads to loss. Butler wonders how preventing someone from mourning is linked with controlling pictures and words and how it cuts down what can be told or shown. She also looks at how suffering is shown to the masses and its impact on people's reactions. Butler points out that such lives are in the "state of suspension" (36), neither living nor dead. Sathaar's death is also not mourned. His own mother does not mourn for him. Sumathi's death is also neither grieved nor mourned by her father. In the case of Ponnuthaayi, her mother thinks that killing Ponnuthaayi is the only way to cleanse the dirt on their family. Therefore, mourning is suspended here also. Furthermore, Aathilakshmi's father also does not mourn her death. Thus, throughout the anthology, mourning and grieving for the victims of violence is prohibited as the lives of the victims are bare life.

Coda

Paava Kadhaigal is a sad reflection that shows deep-rooted social ideas about honour and gender roles plus violence. It focuses mostly on characters from poor backgrounds. The movie shows a sad truth where transgender and women are forced to follow strict gender ideas. This places them in danger with the risk of being hurt if they can not meet society's benchmarks,

making themselves less than humans called “Homo Sacer”. Giorgio Agamben’s ideas about Homo Sacer fit with the lives of these people. Their life depends on their family getting respect. People who break social rules are seen as losers, and nobody cares. Often, this leads to others killing them in a sad event called honour killings because they want their reputation back. Paava Kadhaigal, in its detailed depiction, shows and speaks against these long-lasting social rules. It also gives a harsh attack on the ways that continue such violence and makes people less important. It makes its viewers face brutal facts about the destructive results of strict gender roles and how serious violence based on honour can hurt people seen as different in society. So, the anthology helps people talk and think about things that are not openly discussed. It allows society to look at these unfair rules again and take them down for a better future, with everyone being treated as equal and not less human.

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