

## Treatment of Honour in Cinema: An Analysis of the Tamil Anthology Pava Kathaigal

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### Abstract

Honor crimes are the demonstration of brutality, typically murder, perpetrated by the incomparable authority of the family (usually males) against the male or female family members (primarily females), who are held to have carried dishonor or shame to the family. As of late, the issue of honor killing in India, as in many parts of the world, has been commanding more notice. Considering all the aspects of the nation, India has a profound and established culture in which 'Honour' or 'Pride' is a vital element, controlling the ethics and glory of a family.

As there is an urgent need to address this social wrongdoing, Indian films are taking a significant hand in pointing out this social issue. This article attempts to look at the film *PaavaKathaigal*, translated as, *The Tales of Sin*, the principal Tamil compilation released by Netflix, an online streaming service, on the grounds of the themes 'Honour' and 'Pride.'

**Keywords:** Honour Crimes, Honour Killing, Honour, Pride, Indian Culture, Indian Films, Tamil Compilation, Netflix, *Paava Kathaigal*

### Introduction

An honor or shame killing is the homicide of an individual, especially a woman, from a family because of the perpetrator's conviction that the victim has brought shame or dishonor to the family. In a country like India, which carries down a patriarchal setup; women are not considered individuals with preferences and decisions of their own. Instead, they are regarded as torchbearers of the family's honor. The women who choose not to follow these norms and rules constructed by society are socially ostracized, beaten up, or even killed in the name of honor or pride lost for the family or community due to their actions.

The history of honor killings traces back to ancient periods in India. Mainly it was very much normalized in Tamil culture. S.Muruganathan in his study, "*Honour Killing*" *The Menace - A Case Study In Tamil Nadu*, observes that, "In Tamil culture, the name of

Madurai even a local deity who has a special shrine within the Meenakshi temple in Madurai was murdered by Thirumalaikayaker for falling in love with a member of the royal family".

Neelam Kejriwal, an Indian research scholar, in her article, *Honour Killing in North India*, observes that 'honor' is considered a female-oriented, complex concept, combined with the male privilege to guarantee women doesn't break its fragile equilibrium at any expense. The fear of losing this honor causes the men to support and legitimize the manly hatred and aggression against women, which results in crimes like killing.

As the need to bring forward the social crime of honor killing grew daily, Indian films took a significant hand in projecting the issue through its themes and concepts. Unlike different types of expressions, motion pictures have a conspicuous job in impacting the brain of the mob. *Paavo Kathaigal (Tales of sin)*, a 2020 Indian -Tamil anthology drama film directed by four eminent directors of the Indian film industry, released by a famous online streaming service, Netflix, became noticeable in this context as it handles the sensitive concept of 'honor' and crimes grounded to it.

The online news magazine, *The News Minutes*, points out that Netflix India has done numerous anthology series in multiple languages, including Bollywood, with renowned directors like Anurag Kashyap, Karan Johar, and so on. It is the first Tamil anthology that Netflix delivered in 2020 through *Paava Kathaigal*. The movie incorporates four eminent film directors from the Indian film industry, Sudhakongara, Vignesh Shivan, Gautham Vasudev Menon, and Vetrimaran. *Paavo Kathaigal* investigates how love, pride, and honor impact complex human relationships through four unpredictable and delightful stories.

The anthology comprises four short films, *Thangam* by Sudha Kongara, *Love Panna Uttranum* by Vignesh Shivan, *Vaanmagal* by Goutham Vasudev Menon, and *Our Iravu* by Vetrimaran. In two of the short films in the anthology, the audience is left with the hope of refinement, while in the other two, the viewers are left confronting the repulsion individual submit for the sake of honor. This article examines and analyzes how these four chief directors of the Tamil film industry tackle the theme of honor or pride through their installments and the primary reasons that cause the drive to commit an honor killing.

### **Review Of Literature**

Numerous studies and research have been conducted in the area of honor killing. *A Social-Legal Study On Honour Killing as a Crime in India*, led by Aadhi Prabhune, studies all aspects of honor killing in India. It explores the historical basis of honor killing, the reasons behind them, and suggestions to improve the situation and gather awareness against the crime. The logic behind honor killing pointed out by the study are- the caste system, Khap Panchayat, lack of education, patriarchal mindset, lack of proper legal system, and so on.

Another study carried out by Kaushambi Kaushal, entitled *No Honour in Honour Killing: Comparative Analysis of Indian Traditional Social Structure visa- vis- Gender Violence*, encompasses the violence perspectives, Indian society-tradition, and structure that aids honor killings, the experiences of women and suggestions in law formation to reduce crimes related to honor (p59).

As in the above studies, the Tamil anthology *Paava Kathaigal* also put forward the reason behind the honor killing. Each short anthology movie investigates the theme of honor killing and depicts various reasons behind these executions. Both films, *Love Panna Uttarnam* and *Our Iravu*, extensively analyze the senses like the caste system, lack of education, and patriarchal mindset of the society from the skin to bone. The other two short movies, *Thangam* and *Vaanmagal*, celebrated the theme of honor and executed reasons behind the killing in the name of honor, like gender bigotry, the commodification of women, and the mindset of the society which deposit the responsibility of the award or pride of the family upon the women of the family.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

A melancholic lullaby and an animation video precede each short movie in the anthology. It gives a perplexing clue that the same guardians and families who esteem and venerate their daughters somehow build-up psychological disharmony to harm them for honor and to please society. The cuts of red in the animation video outline the development of a girl, as she changes from a subordinate little child to free thinking grown up in love life and later.

*Thangam*, the first of the four short movies directed by Sudhakongara, is set in 1981 in a rural region of Kovai. Indeed, even throughout the film follows the string of honor, pride, and love, it reveals insight into a few social components that range from sexual orientation, sexual identity, and different living experiences and the reverberation chamber that gets set up when individuals of a similar kind and perspective live with each other.

Initially, the story takes the tone of lament over the crisis happening in the life of a Muslim transwoman, Sathar, played by Kalidas Jayaram. Sathar is constantly and systematically treated as an outcast by the village people and her own family due to her gender identity. Unlike the usual portrayals of the transgender community in movies, Sathar has plans for her life. Amidst all the abuses and labeling she suffers, she finds her own space to love her childhood friend, Saravan, played by Santhanu Bagyaraj. She wishes to marry him after a sex reassignment surgery. Saravan was the only human who accepted her identity and understood her. But thwarting all her desires, Saravan reveals her love to Sathar's sister, Sahira. Eventually, Sathar gets over the shock and pain and even helps the interfaith couples to elope. After that incident, the movie takes another tone of the narrative. A significant chunk of what happened to the critical character is shown off-screen. The village people and even her family boycotts Sathar. As she helped a couple from inter-religion to elope and her gender orientation led her to a pathetic death.

In *The New Indian Express*, an online entertainment magazine, researcher Srinivasan observes that, at one point in the narrative, Sathar mentions how worse a transgender person's plight is in protecting their life and honor than a cisgender woman's. She says, "Ava koodaraathirithaniyapoidalaam, ennaalapogamudiyadhu." The mindset of society towards the transgender community is evident in the climax of the narrative. Even though the village and the family are ready to welcome the interfaith couple back into their lives, they are never spared the chance to eradicate a transwoman who is out of the standard binaries set by society. The highlight of *Thangam* from other stories in the anthology is that, when the other three stories focused on the concept of honor of women, *Thangam* intensified the impact by approaching the same idea by including a transgender person's plight for honor. *Thangam* sets the pace of the anthology quite well with the solid sensual music and visuals, even though there are mixed opinions about music usage in a thirty-minute short art. The narrative doesn't raise hope about society broadening its margins toward the stubborn concepts. At the same time, it projects the dark reality of how complexly the idea of honor is deeply rooted in the mind of the mob.

Vignesh Shivan directorial, *Love Panna Uttaranam*, loosely translated as, *Let Them Love*, has a solid cast of eminent actors, including, Padamkumar, Anjali, Kalki Koechlin, Bharani, and Jaffer Sadiq. The film tackles the issue of honor killing by incorporating the technique of dark humor. Critics evaluate that Vignesh Shivan must have introduced dark comedy as a narration technique to communicate that the only thing one can do at a complex and absurd concept like honor killing is to laugh at it.

The narrative focuses on a casteist politician, Veerasimman, who projects himself to be a seamless supporter of inter-caste or inter-religion marriages in the eyes of the public. But in reality, with the help of his supporters, he murdered the interfaith couples who got married on his support. One of his twin daughters, Aadhi Lakshmi is killed by himself on the advice of the head of his supporters Narykutty, as she commits an interfaith relationship with their car driver. Narykutty, a grey-eyed dwarf fellow, is portrayed as despicable through his actions. He is the one who compels to execute all the murders, including that of Veerasimman's daughter, when he got stuck in a fatherly affection. At a point in the narrative, Narykutty seems to control the whole progression happening in the premise. He can be considered as the representation of the society which does not accept anything that happens out of its norms and conditions.

Vignesh Shivan's effort to introduce the concept of homosexuality is being critically questioned and supported simultaneously. In an online entertainment magazine *High on Films*, author Kumar criticizes Vignesh Shivan's attempt to incorporate homosexuality as queer baiting. Other critics observe that the plot's twist in the climax could be avoided as it seems unnecessary. Opinions like the narrative would have been stronger if the homosexual relationship that Jyoti Lakshmi and Penelope (her friend) revealed was genuine and not a fabricated one to protect their friend Bharani from Narykutty. The film's tale end raises hope against society's social wrongdoings. Veerasimman finally realizes that there is no point in

providing 'honor' and 'pride' a dominant space than love and affection in relationships. The film communicates this hope that society will also realize.

*Vaanmagal*, loosely deciphered as 'Daughter of the skies,' directed by Goutam Vasudev Menon, tackles the concept of honor and its associated crimes. The film explores one of the many reasons why a middle-class family can feel abashed and commit honor killing. The director plays the role of a middle-class father of three children, and Simran plays the part of the mother. The film explores the trauma and trouble an orthodox family undergoes in confronting a tragic sexual assault that happened to their twelve-year-old daughter, Ponnuthayi.

Ponnuthayi, a girl full of dreams and desire to fly high and touch the sky, is suddenly pushed up into maturity with this incident. She had lost her childhood innocence while the whole family tried to conceal what had happened. It is portrayed as sexual assault as a strange ritual to proceed into adulthood. Her mother, Mathi, represents a conservative societal woman trained under patriarchy. She advises her second child Vydehi, during her puberty function that she is now a woman and has to learn how to sit, stand, walk and behave like a woman. She advises that her body is her temple and men will come lustfully behind it, and she has to protect it no matter what. She keeps her body tidy and pure, like a temple. Mathi represents the mindset of society, which thinks it is the responsibility of the women in the family to take care of the honor of the family. Her words justify the statement of the famous French writer, Simon De Beauvoir, in her book, *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 "One is not born but rather become a woman".

After the assault that happened on Ponnuthayi by her brother's friends, who mistook Ponnuthayi's place for Vydehi, the whole family falls into pain and utmost disgust. After they bring Ponnuthayi home, Mathi tries to scrub down the stain of the crime from Ponnuthayi's body but miserably fails when she realizes that the color never vanishes from her mind. Her conservative mind and the setup of an orthodox family to showcase their pride gets hurt by the shame that Ponnuthayi had carried home. At a point in the progression of incidents, she finds it is better to murder her daughter rather than let her live along with the shame that she has to carry lifelong.

Critics suggest that the film also mentions that an orthodox family is still reluctant to approach the legal side for help as the involvement of police and judiciary invites media and mob into their lives and cause harm to the honor of the family.

The movie's climax is hope-bearing, where Mathi realizes the poison in her thoughts. She curses that fraction of a minute when the idea of killing her daughter passed through her mind. She decides to care for her daughter and lead her to all her dreams and heights that she is supposed to reach. The film gives both the horrors and hopes regarding honor killing at the same time.

Vetrimaran's directorial, *Ore Iravu*, translated as 'That Night', examines the aftermath or agony of a decision. Even though he tries to deal with an over-told concept of honor killing, the point at which the film focuses or highlights makes it disturbing, and the agony lasts for the person inflicting it and for the audience. The film begins with a pregnant daughter, Sumathi, played by

Sai Pallavi joyfully rejoined her repelled family in their village. She was cut off from her family and society a few years ago as she eloped with a man from a community considered backward by society. They now live in the city independently.

After coming to know about Sumati's pregnancy, the audience watch Janakiraman, her father, played by Prakash Raj, comes to visit the couple to invite them back to their family and village to conduct a baby shower ceremony. But soon, the viewers will realize that the intentions behind his visit were not neat. He decides to kill his daughter, who is married to a man from a backward community and who is going to give birth to their child.

*The News Minute* opines that the film is a strained investigation of significant occasions over a time span that prompts an unsurprising yet arresting end. The crowded house, so warm and inviting in the beginning, turns into the setting of unspeakable cruelty.

Through minute details and dialogues, Vetri Maran showcases the aftermath of an interfaith marriage in that family. Through actions and conversations, he exhibits its effect on each family member and how society treats them. As the events unfold, at a point, Janakiraman says, "yethuvummarathon," which means, 'nothing will change', to his wife when she inquires about everything set back to normal after the ceremony of the baby shower. But the director intentionally does not give any justification for the act of murdering his daughter on the grounds of honor.

The film conveys a strong message that "education is indeed a tool of social transformation" (Kurian,2015). To an extent, education helps dismantle or reduce the caste system's effects on society. In between the takeaway of events, Sumati's sisters show their wish to live independently like her sister in the city. Sumati advises them to study well so that they can acquire freedom. But she learns that their father stopped them from going to college and school as he thought they would also take the path of their sister once they get educated.

At one point, we find that Janakiraman tries to return from the city without inviting his daughter to the village, watching his daughter live an independent and happy life, but Sumathi stops him. Furthermore, there are many instances in the story where the audience can watch the helplessness of a father compelled by society to execute his daughter, who is held to have brought dishonor to the family. His thoughts about his other children, who are insulted in front of society due to this interfaith marriage, and another daughter who lost her married life due to the same, push him to the verge of crime. But the slightest justification

for committing that crime vanished by focusing on the unfortunate slow death of his daughter in front of him.

After the death of Sumathi, the events that take place are shown as a cartoon to eliminate any chances of criticism that can come up for limiting the screen space of Sumathi's husband, Hari. Overall, the movie successfully inflicted disturbance and agony on the viewers for a considerable period.

### **Conclusion**

Netflix's anthology film *Paava Kathaigal* is undoubtedly complex since it lingers on for a long while, even after you're finished with it. Such is the effect it leaves on the audience. It does that by bringing up numerous significant issues that will prompt solid discussion on different subjects portrayed in the four portions of the compilation. Even though honor killing is the fundamental subject across the fragments, the film also discusses same-sex love, love, including a transsexual person, caste legislative issues, sexual assault, and inter-caste marriage.

The film does not put forth any suggestions to mold society's mindset against honor killing but honestly exhibits its brutality to the world through four short masterpieces. As the number of cases in different parts of the world, especially in India, is increasing, movies are an excellent medium to attract the mob's attention to action-seeking social wrongdoing.

Aysha Taryam, in her book, *The Opposite of Indifference: A Collection of Commentaries, states*, "This is not about religion. This dilemma arises from the concept of shame. Sociology defines it as a family of emotions that arise from viewing the self negatively through the eyes of others. Therefore, it is this fear of judgment that pushes men to murder". As the author suggests, the motive that drives an individual to crimes like murder in the name of honor or pride is "shame. One cannot blame religion, caste, or class for these honor executions, as they are found in every caste, religion, and style. It is the eagerness of the human race to be friendly and sound in the eyes of others, society, or the community. Thus, if anything happens that is out of the organization's guidelines, the intolerance of men, which developed due to the more decisive influence of the patriarchal mindset, and much priority is given to pride or honor of the family, leads them to crimes. Proper awareness, education, and legal systems which provide backup to the affected ones and acceptance of inter-religion or inter-caste marriages by the Khap panchayats in the villages and diminishing hold of the caste system may pay a better path towards a future devoid of crimes on the grounds of honor.

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