

INDUS SCROLLS PRESS

FROM PROMISE TO PRACTICE
RE-THINKING EQUALITY
AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Edited by

DR. R. JANATHA KUMARI

DR. T. ANITHA, DR M. R. MEERA

**From Promise to Practice:
RETHINKING EQUALITY AND HUMAN
RIGHTS**

Edited by
Dr. R. Janatha Kumari, Dr M. R. Meera, Dr.
T. Anitha

ISBN: 978-93-90981-29-8

Printed at
Thompson Press
18.35, Delhi-Mathura Road,
Faridabad - 121007, Haryana

Published by

Indus Scrolls Press
3rd Floor, B-289, Gali No 7
New Seema Puri, Delhi - 110095
Phone: 981412119, 7827722404
www.indusscrolls.com
indusscrollspres@gmail.com

CopyRight © Dr. R. Janatha Kumari, Dr M.
R. Meera, Dr. T. Anitha

First Printed in 2021

Cover Designs: Theta Creatives
Typeset: Black Innovation

CONTENTS

Foreword <i>Dr Shashi Tharoor</i>	vii
Preface	xv
Musings of the Heart <i>Dr. M. Srinivas</i>	xxvii
Communication Rights: An Introspection and Reflection <i>Dr. Merlin Medow</i>	xxxix
1. Future Challenges of the Human Rights Education- The Hypothetical Analysis <i>Dr. K. Devisri</i>	1
2. Refugees and Human Rights <i>Dr Chacko Jose P, Dr Bindu Balagopal</i>	13
3. Impact of MGNREYA on Socio Economic Development of Rural Women – A Conceptual Study <i>Dr. Jisha D. Nair</i>	27
4. Vicissitude in Human Rights of Women and Children: A Study on Barbare Kingslover's Flight Behaviour <i>Dr. S. Sushma Jenifer</i>	41
5. Human Rights and Women <i>Dr. Surekha Somabalan</i>	57
6. Propriety at Jeopardy: Contemporary Gender Issues of India <i>Dr. Shaila K. N.</i>	73
7. Colonial Atrocities Dismantle the Human	85

Rights of Aboriginal Children in Angela
Betzein's Children of The Black Skirt
Dr. J. Chitta

8. Human Rights of Women
Dr. k. Meenakshi Sundaram 95
9. Education: Both Fundamental and Human Rights
Smitha Jose 109
10. Violation of Human Rights in Day – today Life
Dr. Machhindra Govind Varpe 125
11. Human Rights and Education: A study on the
Status of Education Among Tribal People in Tripura
Dr. Sarmistha Banik 137
12. Unzipping child Sexual Abuse: A Review of Aghosh
Vyshnavam's Oruthi and Midhin Madhu's Parvathi
Dr. Priyanka M. C. 161
13. A Study on Human Rights Based
Education in India
Dr. Pradeesh S. 173
14. A Rare Glimpse into the Unextinguishable
Humanity from Ellis Peter's A Grain of Mustard Seed
Dr. S. Nagalekshmi 189
15. The Role of Human rights in the Time
of Covid -19-R
R. P. Kage & L. M. Angadi 195
16. Protection Of Human Rights Of Women
National And International Perspectives
201

UNZIPPING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: A REVIEW OF AGHOSH VYSHNAVAM'S ORUTHI AND MIDHIN MADHU'S *PARVATHI*

■ Dr. Priyanka. M.C.*

Short films are relatively brief when compared to full-length feature films but they are startlingly effective in decoding manifold emotional states. They efficaciously capture life's realities and audaciously address highly contentious issues which are still considered anathema in public. Their easy accessibility, richness of content, brilliant character sketches, and diverse viewpoints make them all the more enticing. Newcomers who aspire to join the filmmaking bandwagon get ample opportunities here to polish their craft before they move on to greener pastures. Though short films play a vital role in contemporary filmmaking, it hasn't received much academic attention. As Mette Hjort comments, "The short film is in many ways the neglected stepchild of cinema studies" (1). Yet, the themes they take up for discussion

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Sree Narayana College, Kollam

deserve kudos and applause. This paper touches a sensitive and important area of human rights— child sexual abuse.

Violence directed against children take multiple forms nowadays, including physical, sexual, and emotional. Child sexual abuse has gained worldwide notoriety because of the lack of proper tools to monitor the situation closely and also due to the inability to come up with effective measures to prevent such untoward occurrences. Such life - altering moments can inflict huge damage and destroy many valuable lives once and forever. Constitutional loopholes often help the offenders escape from the clutches of law even after committing such heinous crimes against children. The grief, shame, and trauma that the victims conceal within themselves as a result of childhood molestation and harassment reveal a lot about the erroneous social systems and the existing systemic power imbalances between children and adults in society. The short films taken up for discussion (*Oruthi* and *Parvathi*) lay bare the distorted lives of sexually abused children.

Highly provocative in its layout and teemed with intense sensuous scenes, *Oruthi* (2018) narrates the trials and tribulations of a young prostitute who is taught the nitty - gritty details of body enjoyment by her mathematics teacher. Taking cue from a true story, Aghosh Vyshnavam, the acclaimed celebrity fashion photographer cum newbie director artfully composes a visual narrative by weaving together a string of logically connected events which substantiates the credibility of the theme. The film effectively dramatizes how society perceives and evaluates

such women - even the men who come to them to satiate their sexual appetites treat them like pariahs - filthy and characterless after the sexual pleasuring. The film starring director Boban Samuel as the notorious womanizer and cine-serial actress Varada as one of his unlucky victims hold an accurate mirror up to society warning the general public to equip their children with the necessary skills to survive in a paedophilic society. The first part of this paper examines in detail the long-term effects of sexual abuse on the psyche of a girl who becomes a prostitute in the long run and the latter part explores the life of a gangraped girl who later takes up prostitution as a means of livelihood.

Child sexual abuse encompasses misappropriation of power using familiarity, trust and dependency to make the victim susceptible. According to Maltz, "sexual abuse occurs whenever one person dominates and exploits another by means of sexual activity or suggestion" (p. 321). Raticandefines childhood sexual abuse as:

any sexual act, overt or covert, between a child and an adult (or older child, where the younger child's participation is obtained through seduction or coercion). Irrespective of how childhood sexual abuse is defined it generally has significant negative and pervasive psychological impact on its victims. (p. 33)

Childhood sexual abuse experiences vary from person to person and therefore cannot be generalized. It comprises not just activities such as petting, stroking genitals, licking

breasts, tongue kissing, oral, anal or vaginal intercourse but also showing pornographic videos, and narrating erotic stories. Children of all age groups can easily fall victim to the above-mentioned ones. Since they are groomed right from childhood to respect and conform to the rules and regulations laid down by elders, it will be easier for lewd teachers to catch their prey which in this case is none other than unsuspecting students. In the short film *Oruthi*, the sexual licentiousness of the teacher is brilliantly summoned up by his former student, "Kanakukoottanumkurakkanummatramallelo sir padipikkunathu, jeevithathilariyendathinellam special class kodukkunna aal aayirunnille—kanakku master. Orupenkuttiethokalathuariyendekaryangalellamthotum, talodiyum umma vechummadiyiliruthiyumellamparan jukodukkunna superstar ayirunnillePisharadi master" (6:30-6:53). Roughly translated, the mathematics teacher taught his girl students not only mathematics but also things they needed to know much later in life. He satisfied his unquenched sexual appetites by exploring and exploiting their prepubescent unripe bodies through provocative touches, improper caresses, and soft kisses. He boldly continued his perverse acts because none of the students complained against his sexual debaucheries either due to fear or lack of sexual knowledge. Parents have a key role to play here because it's their duty to give their children body safety education which primarily includes the ability to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching. Moreover, honest and open communication with children is very essential to boost their self - confidence, to

convey values regarding sexuality, and to help them make responsible choices.

Hall and Hallposit the view that child sexual abuse can seriously affect the socio-psychological terrain of survivors

(2). Victims may find it difficult to nurture interpersonal skills and prefer to remain detached from the outside world for a longer period of time. Their studies go downhill as a result of lack of concentration and consequently poor school performance will become a routine affair (Bromberg and Johnson 346). Melancholy, anxiety, feelings of betrayal, distrust, anger towards oneself and others can make the situation more difficult. Ah Hing, on the other hand, states that even sexually abused learners can become high-academic performers if they channelize their thought pattern and put extra focus on their schoolwork as a way to overcome the trauma inflicted by the abuse (283). But the protagonist in *Oruthi* is not so fortunate, she becomes a prostitute. Years later, she is forced by circumstance to cater to the sexual needs of the same teacher who once ruined her life. He pays a hefty sum to the pimp to get his dream girl. Her sassy attitude and voluptuous figure titillate him and he just wants to enjoy her beautiful body. He envelops her in his arms and tries to take full advantage of the opportunity. But the lady is least interested as can be seen from her revulsion towards the man. He expected a woman who would give him pleasant memories to take back but the girl proves to be a troublemaker and moreover she refuses to cooperate any further with his abnormal sexual desires. She makes her point clear enough and announces all of a sudden that if he wants

to do anything more, he will have to pay extra. This infuriates him to no end and he verbally abuses her and tells quite sarcastically that if she was such a virtuous one, she would have chosen some other occupation. He fails to identify her but she catches him off guard and burst out vehemently. His ego is crumbled and he realizes for the first time the impact of his actions. The teacher sits on the bed in grave shock; the slow rhythmic music highlights the mental turmoil of the teacher who has just experienced the greatest setback in his life. The poignant song played in the background etch out the perfect atmosphere for the film's ending. The murky ambience suits the tone of the film and gives it the extra oomph. She effectively manipulates her body to translate the pangs of alienation and the umpteen hidden agonies faced by such women who are thrown into prostitution by men around them. Boban Samuel plays his part perfectly well as the viewers feel a scathing hatred towards this man even after the film is over which is yet another feather in his cap. *Oruthi* unabashedly depicts men who customarily visit prostitutes in spite of having partners at home thus bringing to light another social reality which is fast gaining momentum in the family circle - the emergence of multiple sexual partners. The film also raises other important issues relating to marriage such as the relevance of sex in married life, the increasing absence of mutually satisfying sexual relationships between the partners, and the alarming rise of extra marital affairs. Frustration in real life, fear of intimacy and misogynistic attitude are also regarded as some of the widely cited reasons for frequent change of partners by experts.

One of the most pervading myths doing rounds regarding prostitution is that it is the oldest profession. In spite of the nerve-racking work sex workers do day in and day out, they are paid a paltry sum by the pimps who take the lion's share of their earnings. The practice of prostitution dehumanizes a woman through sexual objectification. She is reduced to an object and used wilfully without consent. Sexual servicing determines her worth, and her ultimate motive is to bring sexual fulfillment to a man. *Parvathi* (2017) too deals with the sensitive topic of childhood sexual abuse and later foray into prostitution but it also comments on less discussed but equally challenging concerns such as female sexual needs and enjoyment. Here the female protagonist embodies the perfect persona of a well-rounded character who knows how to voice her thoughts even though the tag of a whore haunts her till the end. Her speech as well as body language oozes self-confidence and clarity of vision in a hypocritical male centred world. The film opens with a bored man's frantic search for a call girl via WhatsApp. He proves lucky when he procures the phone number of a prostitute named Parvathi. From his conversation with his friends, it can be clearly ascertained that he is not after sex but an opportunity to indulge in a deeper conversation with the lady in question. In this short film, dialogues take precedence over sex because once the two main characters exchange pleasantries, they embark on a storytelling journey, and literally take us with them. They openly talk about sexual pleasure, consensual-non-consensual sex, lack of freedom in choosing sex partners,

flawed social structures, patriarchal mindsets, etc. Parvathi speaks nonchalantly about her various sexual escapades with men and is not at all shy to admit that she likes sex but at the same time she admits that she knows how to keep her distance from those who inflict pain deliberately to attain pleasure. Her observations on closeted subjects such as sex hit the nail right on the head. Her famous disclosure that "sex is a taboo in the land of Kamasutra" rings true even today (9:30-9:32) At the behest of the client, she discloses her past life in a matter-of-fact manner including the gang rape at the age of fifteen, fear of ostracization, mental trauma, 'ogling eyes' of strangers, the hollow sympathy of men who came to offer their support but ended up on her breasts, and her conscious decision not to press any charges against her wrongdoers. Here, the viewers get to see the fragile, almost vulnerable side of the female lead for the first time:

Parvathi: My entire body was paining for days.

Couldn't even pee...

Customer: Didn't you file any complaint?

Parvathi: Intentionally decided against that. Honestly, I was afraid. Then, people's ogling eyes. Ridicule. Some others, trying to see if I am an interested party. Even those who come to express sympathy will start caressing my hair, but will end up on my breasts. So, I decided to opt against it. (Parvathi 16:9-17:18)

She states in clear terms why she did not press charges against her perpetrators. The fear, anxiety, and desperation

that the victim experiences after the assault is indefinable. Moreover, lengthy medical examinations and detailed intimate questioning by police officers as part of their investigation drain the victims emotionally, physically, and financially. During the trial, victims will have to tolerate loss of privacy, face intimidating questions, encounter depression, and even confront societal distancing. This brings to fore yet another grave issue –lack of safety in public places. Many women are harassed in the most public of places. The root cause of this maltreatment can be traced to the deep contempt lurking within men which compel them to disregard women as equals, and perceive them more as objects, bodies, and sexual beings.

The hero impressed by her frankness, tenacity and undaunted courage takes a firm decision. Their explicit conversations manage to make an impact in the hearts and minds of the uncommitted viewers who usually shirk away from such blunt realities and maintain a phony attitude. Unlike other films, where the defiled female characters have to meekly accept their fate and continue with their monotonous and inglorious professions, here the female protagonist is given a rare second chance which she uses it to her advantage by excelling as a wife, a mother and as a writer. The concept of virile masculinity is demolished and undermined by the director by bringing in a hero who effortlessly breaks away the preconceived notions of social morality and shows willingness to marry a girl who stands outside the periphery of commonly accepted standards of morality. Both the central characters are given enough and

more space to expose the nuances of their characters in the best possible manner. Moral policing is another contentious issue the film embarks on; the central character is exploited multiple times by known and unknown men who prefer sex more than a woman's company. She is branded as a harlot long before she takes up prostitution as her livelihood. Devaki Rajendran as Parvathy and Syamaprasadh M Santhosh as the customer play their respective roles with panache. Clear vocal tone, refined body language, respectful dress selection, apt background score, bright open exteriors and roadside ambience add to the beauty of the short film. Towards the end, past and present momentarily coalesce to create a perfect amalgam of thought and feeling at once rich in effect.

The male leads in both the short films deserve equal attention as the female protagonists as they personify two different character types present in contemporary society. While the middle-aged school master in *Oruthi* proves to be a sex addict, the latter proves to be more humane and kinder in his illicit sexual wanderings. Both Aghosh Vyshnavam and Midhun Madhu invert mainstream cinema's clichéd formula of using larger-than-life hero images of men through their audacious portrayal of a decaying society where children are perceived as sex objects by vicious adults who callously exploit their naivety and lack of sexual awareness. Both the female protagonists suffer sexual harassment way before they reach adolescence which more or less decide their choice of profession. The choreographers have masterfully transgressed the limitations of time-boundedness of short

filmmaking through apt camera movements, specialized colour settings, lighting and framing. If minimalistic lighting, gloomy indoor setting and extreme close up shots of the main characters are used to externalize the characters' feelings in the first, then expansive outdoor environments and open conversations take centre stage in the latter. The films under study succeed in bringing to the fore a society obsessed with diverse sexual inclinations.

References

1. Ah Hing, A D. *The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) on the School Life Experiences and Academic Performance of Adult CSA Survivors. Language Quality Assurance Practitioners*. PhD Thesis, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan U, pp.283.
2. Bromberg, D.S., & Johnson, B.T. *Psychology in the Schools*. John Wiley and Sons, 2001.
3. Hall, M & Hall, J. "The Long-term Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Counseling Implications." *American Counseling Association VISTAS Online*, 11 November 2020, https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/vistas_2011_article_19.pdf?sfvrsn=144ec071_11
4. Hjort, Mette. "What's so Funny? Reflections on Jokes and Short Films" *P.O.V.* no.9,2000.p1.
5. http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_09/section_2/artc4A.html (accessed 11 Nov 2020).
6. Maltz, W. "Treating the Sexual Intimacy Concerns of Sexual Abuse Survivors." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* vol.17, no.4,2002,pp.321-327.
7. https://www.counseling.org/docs/disaster-and-trauma_sexual-

-
- abuse/long-term-effects-of-childhood-sexual-abuse.pdf?sfvrsn=2).
8. *Oruthi*. Dir. Aghosh Vyshnavam. Perf. Boban Samuel, Varada, and Narasimha Swami. Vingles Channel, 2018.
 9. *Parvathi*. Dir. Midhin Madhu. Perf. Devaki Rajendran, Syamaprasad M Santhosh, Ameya. Republic of Motion Pictures, 2017.
 10. Ratican, K. "Sexual Abuse Survivors: Identifying Symptoms and Special Treatment Considerations." *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 71(1), 1992, pp.33-38.