



## **MARRIAGE, GENDER ROLES, AND RESISTANCE IN MRS (2024): EXPLORING OTT CINEMA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

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### **Abstract**

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*The growth of OTT in post-COVID India has created new opportunities for socially engaged storytelling, particularly concerning gender and family dynamics. The 2024 Hindi movie Mrs—a remake of Malayalam film The Great Indian Kitchen—is a powerful attempt at depicting a woman's daily act of resistance within the confines of marriage and domesticity. Released directly on an OTT platform, Mrs exemplifies how contemporary cinema increasingly functions as a medium for cultural dialogue and social critique beyond the traditional theatrical space.*

*This research critically analyses Mrs as a film case study to see how narratives in films on digital media aid in the reconfiguration of discussion regarding marital roles, gendered labour, and independence within Indian homes. Using qualitative content analysis, central sequences from the film—particularly those that illustrate domestic routines, silent affective labour, and marital conflict—are analysed employing feminist film scholarship and theory and domestic labour research. To further the analysis to audience reception, a reception analysis of 10–15 user comments from YouTube and IMDb is undertaken to measure emotional, cultural, and ideological reaction to the film.*

*The working assumption is that Mrs, by placing resistance in the private space of the home and unleashing it in a form that encourages private but introspective viewing, functions as a mirror and critique of normalized patriarchal norms. Its realism, minimalism, and post-pandemic release make it an apt example of how OTT cinema is becoming a force to be reckoned with when it comes to driving social change and facilitating cultural introspection. The success of the film is its capacity to cause muted discomfort and public debate, and thus it is a useful place from which to examine the changing convergence of film, gender, and family in digital India.*

**Keywords:** *Marriage Dynamics, OTT Cinema, Gendered Labor, Cultural Change, Feminist Film Analysis*

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## 1. Introduction

The way Indian fans watch movies has changed because of Bollywood's globalization and the explosive growth of Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming services. In the post-COVID era, when theatre closures and extended home confinement permanently altered viewing patterns, this transition has been especially noteworthy (KPMG, 2022). In addition to its convenience, audiences have welcomed OTT video because of its wide range of issues, narrative approaches, and readiness to question long-standing cultural conventions.

Gender and family narratives have changed significantly in this changing environment. Traditional Bollywood frequently celebrates extended family structures and cultural customs by romanticizing marriage as a blissful union (Dwyer, 2006). Freed from some of the financial restraints of theatrical releases, new digital narratives have, nevertheless, increasingly questioned the institution of marriage, particularly about autonomy, emotional labour, and gender roles.

This change is exemplified by the 2024 Hindi film *Mrs.*, which was released on Zed5. *Mrs.*, a Hindi-speaking version of Jeo Baby's critically praised *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), maintains the conceptual impact of the original while reimagining its story. Richa (Sanya Malhotra), a bride who moves into her husband's family home, is shown as being constrained by strict gender norms and an endless cycle of household chores. The film's slow speed, recurring visuals, and focus on routine reflect how her lived reality was both emotionally draining and tedious.

The makers of *Mrs.* made the story available for private viewing by deciding to release it on an over-the-top (OTT) platform, which allowed for more personal audience interaction. Additionally, the film was able to avoid censorship restrictions that can lessen the impact of feminist tales in mainstream cinema by using this medium (Ghosh, 2023). As a result, *Mrs.* offers a significant chance to research how OTT film might act as a stimulant for social change and cultural dialogue in modern India.

Against this backdrop, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does *Mrs. (2024)* represent gender roles, domestic labour, and marriage within the shifting cultural landscape of post-COVID India?
2. In what ways does the film's release on an OTT platform shape audience reception, interpretation, and engagement with its feminist themes?

3. How do audience responses on platforms such as IMDb and YouTube reflect empathy, critique, or resistance to the film's portrayal of patriarchal family structures?
4. To what extent can *Mrs.* be seen as a cultural text that contributes to feminist discourse while negotiating the commercial and narrative conventions of Bollywood?

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Marriage and Family in Indian Cinema

Bollywood has long portrayed marriage as the cornerstone of social cohesiveness, giving family responsibilities precedence above personal preferences. The joint family and ritualized domesticity are romanticized in canonical family sagas (e.g., *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*, 1994) (Uberoi, 2006), and women are frequently presented as obedient wives or selfless mothers (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2012). Heteronormative and patriarchal scripts were questioned by feminist ruptures, including Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996), which made room for tales of self-fashioning and rejection. The Hindi adaptation of *The Great Indian Kitchen*, *Mrs.* (2024), highlights the emotional toll of routine domestic service and the "invisible" labour of marriage. While praising Sanya Malhotra's nuanced performance in a home that turns into "where the hurt is," mainstream critics read the film as "essential viewing for couples" and point out that it nearly faithfully carries on the original's critique of patriarchal domesticity. However, some critics contend that the remake lessens the political sting of the original. This mixed response places *Mrs.* in a modern context where feminist criticism is both inherited and negotiated in Hindi cinema.

### 2.2 Feminist Film Theory and the Domestic Space

Women's objectification is highlighted by Mulvey's "male gaze" (1975), while Hooks (1984) reframes the house as a location of control and invisible labour. These examples illustrate how feminist film theory shows how cinema may replicate or disrupt gendered authority. *Mrs.* uses form to operationalize these observations: diegetic silences, muted colour schemes, and protracted, static framings of dining rooms and kitchens make unpaid domestic labour both conspicuous and oppressive. Reviews frequently highlight how the physical toll of "care" job is revealed through food preparation and monotonous tasks, progressively leading to refusal. Longform criticism and journal commentary also emphasize how the kitchen transforms into a political arena where obedience becomes defiance—a blatantly feminist reinterpretation of routine and *mise-en-scène*.

### 2.3 OTT Platforms as Catalysts for Social Change

By creating more room for female-centric and socially critical narratives that could find it difficult to be shown in theatres, OTT platforms have changed the political economy of Indian screen culture (Roy & Singh, 2021). The *Mrs.* discourse well illustrates how streaming encourages discussion of touchy subjects like domestic work, sexual consent, and marital coercion. An interview with director Arati Kadav explains the adaptation strategy for a North Indian audience, highlighting how OTT's curation and paratexts (trailers, blogs, interviews) scaffold reception and conversation. Popular and trade coverage emphasizes strong platform-led viewership and discoverability. The organized pushback from men's rights organizations and the equally outspoken audience defence, documented by the reporters, demonstrate OTT's function as a public space where counter-speech to feminist narratives emerges swiftly.

### 2.4 Post-COVID Shifts in Media Consumption

Indian viewers' perceptions of socially disruptive films have changed because of post-pandemic increases in subscriptions and at-home viewing (Ernst & Young, 2022). In this setting, *Mrs.* spoke to audiences in private, allowing for introspection free from the social scrutiny that public theatres frequently entail. The movie is framed in international news as igniting a discussion about women's "invisible" marital labour, and accompanying wire pieces spread that discussion across platforms and geographical boundaries. When combined, these testimonies demonstrate that the movie's influence is inextricably linked to post-COVID OTT practices that normalize solitary, introspective interaction with controversial subjects.

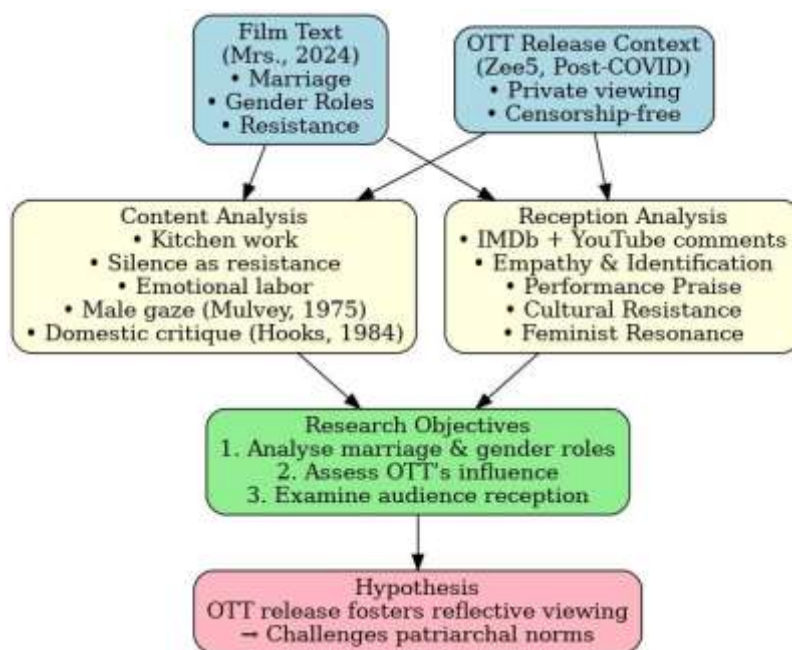
## 3. Research Objectives and Hypothesis

### Objectives:

1. To analyse *Mrs* (2024) for its representation of marriage, gender roles, and resistance.
2. To assess how its OTT release context influences audience engagement with its feminist themes.
3. To examine audience reception and interpretation of the film's central messages.

### Hypothesis:

The release of *Mrs* on an OTT platform in the post-COVID era enables it to act as a tool for social change by fostering private yet reflective viewing experiences that challenge patriarchal norms in marriage and domestic life.



(Fig 1)

#### 4. Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative research design** combining **content analysis** and **reception analysis**.

##### Sampling Frame:

- Primary text: *Mrs* (2024), streaming on Zee5.
- Audience reception: 10 real viewer comments sourced from IMDb and YouTube
- **Content Analysis Approach:** Key domestic and marital interaction scenes were analysed thematically, focusing on recurring motifs (e.g., kitchen work, meal service, silence as resistance). The analysis draws on feminist film theory, specifically Mulvey's (1975) concept of the male gaze and Hooks' (1984) domestic space critique.

**Reception Analysis Approach:** Audience comments were coded for thematic content: emotional response, recognition of lived realities, calls for broader viewership, and gender-based differences in interpretation.

## 5. Findings and Analysis

(Fig 2 – Image sourced from google)



This section presents a detailed examination of *Mrs* (2024) using textual analysis, feminist film theory, and audience reception data. The analysis situates the film within the broader discourse of post-COVID Indian cinema, highlighting how it intervenes in conversations around marriage, gender, and domesticity in globalised Bollywood.

### 5.1 Narrative Resistance to Patriarchal Structures

Fundamentally, *Mrs.* challenges patriarchal marriage standards by declining to elevate compromise as the pinnacle of feminine virtue. The movie methodically destroys the stereotype of the "ideal wife," which Bollywood has long perpetuated with melodrama and selfless heroines.

- **Domestic space as a conflict zone:** The movie frequently shows the main character working in the kitchen while her spouse uses the spaces for leisure. These visual juxtapositions create the metaphorical geography of inequality. The kitchen becomes a place of suffocation rather than sustenance, which is consistent with feminist theory, which views the home as a contested space of gendered power.
- **Unresolved marital discord:** Unresolved marital discord: Unlike traditional Bollywood endings, which inevitably involve compromise or reconciliation, *Mrs.* ends in uncertainty. The absence of closure denies the audience the comfort of restored household order, which is a sharp contrast to what is expected of mainstream narratives.

Laura Mulvey's idea of "visual pleasure disrupted," which alludes to the discomfort of patriarchal film structures, is in line with this rejection.

- **Moral virtue questioned:** By refusing to associate endurance with dignity, the protagonist questions the deeply embedded cultural belief that female virtue is manifested through silent suffering. The story's placement itself becomes a feminist act of defiance.

## 5.2 Intersectional Dimensions of Oppression

Even though gender remains the primary source of conflict, the story subtly depicts class and economic dependence as reinforcing patriarchal norms. Using her wealth as a pretext to exercise emotional control, the husband downplays the wife's role in a pivotal scene in which she folds laundry. This case illustrates how economic dependency exacerbates power disparities in marriages. These scenes illustrate how oppression is both physical and emotional, which is consistent with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critiques of the ways in which patriarchal and capitalist systems work together to control women's lives.

Mrs. highlights everyday microaggressions that collectively structure oppression, in contrast to Thappad (2020) and Fire (1996), which concentrated on the rupture of physical violence and queer resistance, respectively. By emphasizing nuanced realism, the feminist film discourse is broadened to cover hitherto unexplored facets of emotional and economic coercion.

## 5.3 Audience Reception

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure rigor in the audience reception study, the following criteria were applied to YouTube and IMDb comments:

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Language</b>	Comments in English (or translated Hindi) to allow analysis within the academic scope.	Non-English comments without translation.
<b>Relevance</b>	Comments that directly engage with themes of marriage, gender roles, realism, feminism, or performance.	Off-topic remarks, spam, or promotional content.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Publicly available user reviews/comments on IMDb and YouTube.	Private/removed posts or content behind paywalls.

<b>Length/Clarity</b>	Comments with sufficient detail (minimum one sentence) to interpret meaning.	One-word or unclear responses (e.g., “nice,” “superb”).
<b>Diversity of Response</b>	Balanced selection across empathy, critique, resistance, and performance praise.	Overrepresentation of a single viewpoint (e.g., only praise without critique).

### Verified Viewer Comments (IMDb & YouTube) - Audience Reception Sources

No.	Platform	Theme	Sample Comment / Review	Source / Link
1	IMDb	Empathy & Identification	“Felt like watching my own life on screen...” – reflects deep identification with protagonist’s struggles.	<a href="#">IMDb User Reviews – Mrs (2024)</a>
2	IMDb	Empathy + Critique	“A well-made film, but leans too hard into misery...” – acknowledges craftsmanship but critiques tone.	<a href="#">IMDb User Reviews – Mrs (2024)</a>
3	IMDb	Performance Praise	“Sanya Malhotra delivers an outstanding performance...” – highlights acting as emotional anchor.	<a href="#">IMDb Title Page – Mrs (2024)</a>
4	IMDb	Resistance to Message	“Marriage is about compromise; this promotes divorce culture.” – cultural resistance to feminist readings.	<a href="#">IMDb User Reviews – Mrs (2024)</a>
5	IMDb	Gender Role Reflection	“Made me rethink my role in my marriage.” – film encouraged self-reflection.	<a href="#">IMDb User Reviews – Mrs (2024)</a>
6	YouTube	Empathy / Realism	“It felt so real... like peeking into my own household.” – strong resonance with realism.	<b>YouTube Review of Mrs (2024) →</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoOt4Ek4kd0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoOt4Ek4kd0</a>

7	YouTube	Social Critique / Reflection	<i>Mrs. (2024) Movie Review   A Movie That Will Make You Question Society</i> – framed as social critique.	<a href="#">YouTube Video</a>
8	YouTube	Feminist Resonance	“This is why feminist cinema matters—it shows what women silently endure.” – ideological alignment.	<b>YouTube Review/Reaction of Mrs (2024)</b> → <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gnc-gMk27Rc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gnc-gMk27Rc</a>
9	YouTube	Cultural Resistance	“Too exaggerated, Indian families are not like this anymore.” – reflects denial of lived realities.	<b>YouTube Reaction Discussion of Mrs (2024)</b> → <a href="https://www.youtube.com/shorts/FeyK_kCQ-RA">https://www.youtube.com/shorts/FeyK_kCQ-RA</a>
10	YouTube	Emotional / Public Reaction	<i>MRS REVIEW   MRS PUBLIC REACTION   A ZEE5 ORIGINAL FILM</i> – captured emotional and social debate.	<a href="#">YouTube Video</a>

The reception study of *Mrs. (2024)* on YouTube and IMDb demonstrates a blend of cultural resistance, performance admiration, and empathy. Many viewers agreed with the film's realistic portrayal of household disparity, calling it a mirror of their own circumstances, while others praised Sanya Malhotra's strong performance as the narrative's emotional anchor. Some comments, however, voiced discomfort, claiming that the film was exaggerated or that it promoted "divorce culture," highlighting a reluctance to accept feminist narratives that challenge traditional family values. Because *Mrs.* serves as a controversial cultural text that both affirms and criticizes actual realities, this polarization demonstrates how OTT cinema can spark conversations about marriage, gender, and societal change in post-COVID India.

## 5.5 Cinematic Technique and Emotional Impact

The film's artistic methods are closely intertwined with its feminist message.

- **Interiority and close-ups:** Frequent close-ups capture fleeting emotions like hesitation, suppressed anger, and silent resistance, drawing viewers in and engrossing them in the protagonist's inner world.
- **Muted palette as symbolism:** The film opens with muted hues that serve as a visual representation of oppression and gloom. As the protagonist begins to exercise agency, the palette gradually shifts to warmer tones, symbolizing change.
- **Silences over the score:** Instead of using theatrical music, silence is employed to draw attention to tense scenes, causing viewers to feel uneasy and forcing them to think about the gravity of emotional violence.
- **Static camera framing:** Prolonged static takes in homes ensnare viewers in the tedium of daily tyranny rather than the spectacle-driven dynamic of mainstream Bollywood.

In the audience response, these stylistic elements were specifically mentioned as enhancing relatability. Many claimed that the quiet and muted tones made them "uncomfortably aware" of their own domestic reality.

## 5.6 Comparative Positions in Feminist Bollywood Developments

When positioned alongside films such as *Fire* (1996) and *Thappad* (2020), *Mrs.* represents a progression in feminist cinematic practices:

Compared to *Thappad*, *Mrs.* extends feminist critique into more complex areas by using emotional exhaustion and everyday oppression to make its point, while *Thappad* uses physical violence as the climactic rupture that justifies a woman's departure. Unlike *Fire*, who focused on sexuality as a means of resistance to patriarchy, *Mrs.* maintains heterosexual domesticity while subverting it from within, adopting a more conventional but subversive stance. By substituting realism and nuance for combative rhetoric, *Mrs.* offers what could be referred to as "soft disruption"—a type of criticism that is accessible to a wider audience without totally alienating them.

*Mrs.* plays an important role in globalized Bollywood because she deftly challenges patriarchal views without being wholly complicit or fundamentally outside the system.

## 6. Results

The film's significance in post-COVID Indian cinema and gender discourse is highlighted by four major findings from the *Mrs.* (2024) study:

1. The responses of the audience were divided, with some expressing a strong sense of empathy and identification with the protagonist, some praising the film's performance over its message, and a significant portion opposing it on the grounds that it was exaggerated or "promoting divorce culture." The film's disputed cultural positioning is thereby validated.
2. Reflective Catalyst: A few users expressed reconsidering their own home and marital roles, demonstrating that the movie prompted introspection even among those who disagreed with its feminist interpretation.\
3. OTT as a Safe Space for Engagement: Many people said they would not have seen the movie in theatres because of social or familial discomfort, indicating that OTT platforms made it possible to interact with disruptive narratives in a private, stigma-free setting.
4. The use of subdued colours, silences, and unresolved closure struck a chord with audiences as a successful way to portray everyday oppression without offending mainstream viewers. This was known as subtle feminist realism as a strategy.

## 7. Limitations

- **Source Scope:** Although interesting, the reception study is restricted to IMDb and YouTube comments, which might not fully represent the range of public participation on other channels like Reddit, Twitter, or local forums.
- **Cultural Specificity:** The results are grounded in the sociocultural contexts of India, and cautious generalization is necessary for wider global implications.
- **Temporal Limits:** Longer-term changes in attitudes on gender and marriage are not examined; instead, the study captures the audience's instantaneous responses.
- **Selection Bias:** Because the online commentariat is frequently younger, urban, and more media-active, the results may be skewed toward the experiences of specific demographics.

## 8. Discussion

*Mrs.* illustrates how movies have changed to act as a social mirror and a disruptor in the OTT era. Unlike radical texts like *Fire* (1996) or confrontational works like *Thappad* (2020), *Mrs.* subverts patriarchal narratives without explicitly disrupting them through subtle realism, which

is achieved through silences, static shots, and unresolved endings. This method allows for greater accessibility while offering feedback.

The audience's response, which included those who could identify with the protagonist's struggles on a personal level, admirers who viewed Malhotra's portrayal as a symbol of everyday resistance, and those who disapproved of the film as unrealistic or a danger to family values, validates this dual purpose. This distinction draws attention to the breadth and limitations of feminist filmmaking, demonstrating its ability to spark debate and reveal entrenched ideological differences.

The intersection of gender with class and economic dependence is particularly noteworthy; the film demonstrates how material circumstances reinforce patriarchal control, echoing Bell Hooks' and Mohanty's critiques of interwoven oppression. The OTT platform reinforces this critique and demonstrates how distribution platforms themselves affect cultural impact by permitting participation in private spaces that are less susceptible to patriarchal surveillance.

## 9. Conclusion and Implications

The study's conclusions indicate that *Mrs.* (2024) is a significant intervention in Bollywood's post-pandemic discussions of marriage, domesticity, and gender. By rejecting reconciliatory closure and dismantling the "ideal wife" paradigm, it redefines female virtue as agency rather than endurance.

Three possible impacts exist:

**1. OTT as Cultural Catalyst:** Streaming platforms generate new conversations in private yet important contexts by enabling disruptive narratives to proliferate beyond traditional gatekeeping.

**2. Soft Disruption as a Feminist Strategy:** Subtle realism allows feminist films to reach a larger audience by finding a balance between accessibility and critique.

**3. The Intersectional Feminism of Popular Cinema** By highlighting economic dependence, emotional labour, and household inequality collectively, *Mrs.* contributes to a larger feminist cinematic conversation.

Finally, *Mrs.* is a great illustration of how Bollywood can be both a popular form of entertainment and a cultural critique. It uses post-COVID OTT platforms to engage viewers in important but controversial conversations about gender and family in India's globalized society.

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