

# Discovering Cartesian Dualism in the Women of the Indian Patriarchy the Great Indian Kitchen

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## Abstract

Cartesian Dualism deals mainly with the double existence of man. It distinguishes the mind from the body. The women belonging to the Indian patriarchy are subject to Cartesian dualism. The Malayalam films, Sthreedhanam (1993) and The Great Indian Kitchen (2021), portrays a real picture of Indian Patriarchy. The central characters in both these films are women subjected to Cartesian dualism. They do not act according to their mind. They both try to sacrifice their own dreams and ambitions to make their married life successful. But it ends as a disaster. This research paper shows how Cartesian dualism reflected in the women of Indian patriarchy are subject of the movies made in both 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Keywords: Cartesian, Dualism, Patriarchy, Identity Crisis.

## Introduction

“I think, therefore I am”(Rene Descartes).

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is attributed with developing Cartesian dualism. He argues that the mind is something different from any body. Dualism is the belief that anything is made up of fundamentally different components. Substance dualism suggests that mind and matter are distinct kinds of foundations. Property dualism asserts that the ontological distinction lies between mind and matter properties. Predicate dualism suggests the

irreducibility of mental predicates to Cartesian dualism deals specifically with the dual existence of man. Descartes claimed that man consisted of matter and mind. Matter is the physical part which talks, walks and acts the accordion. Mind is the nonphysical part that thinks, doubts and remembers. He was the first to identify the mind-body problem in the form it exists today. Ontological dualism relates to mind and matter. Hence, it makes dual commitments about nature of existence. Ontological dualism is divided into three distinct types. They are substance dualism, property dualism and predicate dualism.

Substance dualism is also known as Cartesian dualism. It is defended by Rene Descartes. He argues that there are two kinds of foundations: mental and physical. This philosophy states that the body cannot think and mental can exist outside the body. The scientific discoveries of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Copernican Revolution reinforced the belief that the unique way of knowledge is the scientific method. Bodies were studied by means of anatomy, physiology, biochemistry and physics (reductionism). For the following centuries, mind-body dualism would have remained the biomedical paradigm and model.

‘Sthreedhanam’ is a 1993 family movie centered upon a submissive woman character, Vindhya. She belongs to a poor family and hence fails to give the proposed dowry to her husband’s (Shanthan) family. This puts her into trouble and her mother-in-law treats her like a servant. The 2021 film, The Great Indian Kitchen focuses on a female character played by Nimisha Sajayan who dreams of being a dance teacher but ends up sacrificing all dreams for her superstitious, orthodox in-laws. Her body is distinct from her soul which constantly tells her to chase her dreams. Somehow she is unable to move in that direction because of her in-laws. Cartesian dualism is reflected clearly in both these films as both these female characters are subjected to toxic habitat of the Indian patriarchy.

Cartesian dualism is also known as mind-body dualism. Rene Descartes identified the mind with consciousness and self-awareness and distinguished this from the brain as the seat

of intelligence. Dualism is the claim that there are essentially two different kinds or types of objects or categories in the world. Both are needed to give a complete description of reality, although these two states of existence are fundamentally different in most ways. Descartes concludes that all entities that exist in the world fall under one of the two categories. Minds are thinking things, entities capable of affirming, denying, judging, willing, unwilling and have no perceptions. Bodies are tangible physical objects and have extension.

The Great Indian Kitchen is one of the most powerful films on patriarchy. The movie, questions the deep rootedness of patriarchy in our society in a realistic manner. In the most harrowing fashion, the movie gives us a glimpse into the life of a married woman in India and her role in the kitchen. An educated and talented dancer (NimishaSajayan), finds herself in an arranged marriage to a teacher (SurajVenjaramood) in a very patriarchal and traditional family. The film begins in a dance class where Nimisha is seen cheerful. She gets married and can be seen in her husband's home a couple of scenes later. Her life unfolds in the kitchen of her husband's home. The household chore slowly turns into a nightmare, a grind from which she can't escape. She tries to grapple with the situation while trying to be the ideal wife and daughter-in-law. She starts to suffocate with nobody to her rescue. We see her in the kitchen or attending to the men in the house. The men in the movie are seen to be lazing around while the women toil and break their backs in the kitchen. The men are scrolling through videos on whatsapp and leaving behind food waste on the dining table for the woman to clean. The film's haunting shots yet beautiful shots take place in the kitchen. Women are making lip-smackingly delicious dishes in the most horrible conditions. This shows the stark reality and how patriarchy has enslaved women. Most of the scenes take place in the kitchen. This is just to show that Indian patriarchy have normalized women being in the kitchen. Nimisha tells her husband that she'd really appreciate some foreplay when they get intimate. The husband mocks at her knowledge and behaves as though it is crime for women to seek foreplay. The

hard hitting subplot is about menstruation and we see how unkind her family behaves to her. As Suraj prepares to go for pilgrimage, they talk about purity. Nobody is bothered about the women who slog to keep everything clean. They do not earn any respect. Suraj's father ask Nimisha to drop her idea of applying for a job because he feels the job women do in the house is far more superior to what bureaucrats and ministers do.

Nimisha comes from an educated family. She has learnt table manners and also tries applying it in her husband's home. She keeps a waste plate so that men could throw in the food waste in that. But the traditional, old family of Suraj is new to such manners and throws waste on the table. She finds it difficult to eat with such a mess in the table. This shows that how unfair men behave towards their wives and mothers in the Indian patriarchy. Men forget about the women who works in the kitchen while eating. They are not concerned how badly they work to make their dishes taste spectacular. They fail to appreciate the taste of the food and also to sit together while eating. Here, we can see that Nimisha's mind and body works in different directions. Her mind do not allow her to eat amongst the mess. As she sees her mother-in-law eating, her body acts according to what is expected. In this movie, the women can only be seen to eat after the men. The woman of the Indian patriarchy is expected to be submissive even in their bedroom. The men can use the women and their bodies whenever they like. But the man refuses to hear or grant the woman's sexual desires. The Indian patriarchy believes that sexual desires are only for men and not for women. Here, we can see that her mind is confused whether to make love with a person who do not care about her desires. But her body moves according to what is expected from her by Suraj. Nimisha is very talented dancer and wishes to become a dance teacher which her family disapproves of. Her mind tells her to follow her dream. But she tries to fit in the patriarchal expectations of her husband's family. She is also seen to be bathing in the river, laying on the floor and being avoided as she undergoes menstruation. This shows the cruel nature of the Indian patriarchy.

The mind and body of Nimisha swings in opposite directions as she is suffering from these atrocities.

Sthreedhanam is a 1993 family movie starring Jagadish and Urvashi. The name Sthreedhanam means dowry which is itself an oppression to women by the society of Indian patriarchy. The dowry began with the gift exchange during marriage and later turned into a nightmare for the girl's family. Sthreedhanam shows the hard realities faced by poor families belonging to the Indian patriarchy. Vindhya is a well-mannered girl who easily adjusts to her husband's family. But as she unfolds her story in the husband's home she is treated more like a servant than a daughter-in-law mainly because her family has not given the whole amount of dowry proposed to the Shanthan's family. Her mind tells her to react to the situations where her mother-in-law treats her like a slave. But her body is numb to such hard situations. Her mother-in-law even tries to kill the foetus twice in thirst of the money. Soon after her father dies, she is sent home as it becomes difficult for her family to pay off the dowry.

### **Conclusion**

Cartesian dualism is reflected in the women character of both the movies. Although these movies belong to different centuries the picture of the kitchen is the same in both the eras. This shows how badly nothing changed even after a century. People have become more educated and aware about these subjects. But it has made no help in their families. They might be a role model in the public, but the hard realities of the Indian patriarchy is still seen in the Indian families. This research paper shows how Cartesian dualism is reflected in the lives of women subjected to Indian patriarchy who had to suppress their emotions, dreams, aspirations and even sexual desires.

### **Bio-Note**

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