

RESEARCH ARTICLE**The Invisible Beings of a Home: A Detailed Analysis of Benevolent Sexism in *3BHK***

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Abstract

This paper deals with the critical analysis of a Tamil language Indian movie *3BHK* (2025) directed by Sri Ganesh, under the lens of Ambivalent Sexism Theory. The theory, introduced by Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske in 1996, argues that, sexism need not be hostile always, but can be benevolent too. Sexism is a set of prejudices against one sex group by the other. It is like any other discrimination which has both generationally formed perpetrator group and victim group. In sexism, the former is men and the latter is women, in most cases. According to the intensity of discrimination, sexism could be mild to wild or unrecognisable to brutal. Benevolent Sexism, coined by the same theorists, Glick and Fiske, can be defined as sex-based discrimination which is kind of positive in appearance, but very harmful in reality, like a fake friend. In this research paper, the movie *3BHK* is examined in-depth to see how benevolent sexism manipulates within the movie.

Keywords: Benevolent sexism, Gender issues, Home, Gender-discrimination, Sexism, Family, Movie, Ambivalent sexism theory

Introduction

Since time immemorial, women have been generally attributed a lower status by the men folk, except in some matriarchal societies. Women, although the other face of the same coin, were disempowered to suit them inside the four walls when men enjoyed complete liberty. Like any other animal, regardless of the gender human beings are all born with the innate ability of living self-sufficient. However, as a baby girl grows up, she undergoes constant pruning and training and eventually reforms to a dependent, weak, fragile and submissive humanoid like human being, by the early age of adolescence. Later on, she remains trapped in that moulded state, until her last breath. This whole phenomenon has been explored both supportingly and critically by evolving media, from ancient rock-carved and written epics to modern films and virtual realities.

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From fast showing of photographs to OTT platforms, movies have undergone a giant transformation. In 1895, Paris witnessed a picturised moving scene for the first time in the world. Since then, it has been a long journey; from short clips to silent movies, from there to black and white movies, then to colour movies, later to 3D movies and finally to the current form. Ever since the movies started emerging, like writings, they began to deeply influence the public. From characters to their costumes and dialogues, people started imitating everything. Due to this tendency to imitate, cinema got a control over the people. If it decides to propagate any kind of discrimination like racism, casteism or sexism, it can; similarly, if it thinks of eliminating those discriminations, that also can be done. Along with the big budget commercial fantasy movies, natural and realistic movies too captured the minds of people. When fantasy movies carried the spectators to a surrealistic universe, realistic movies opened the eyes of spectators to the goodnnesses and the badnnesses in the actual world of reality. The movie *3BHK*, released in 2025, falls into the latter category. *3BHK* is a Tamil language movie, directed by Sri Ganesh, a young promising director in Tamil film industry. It is a realistic movie which showcases even the nuances of a general middle-class family life. The primary actors of the movie are Siddharth, R. Sarathkumar, Devayani and Meetha Raghunath.

This research paper deals with how women characters in the selected movie are often ignored and taken for granted by the male characters living with them. It also deeply analyses how sexism works within a perfect looking family.

Ambivalent Sexism Theory

Ambivalent Sexism Theory was coined and contributed by two American social psychologists, namely, Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, through their research paper, “The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism”, published in the year, 1996. This theory proposes that, discrimination against one sex by the other, also known as sexism, is not only about being partial and hostile towards one sex, but it is also about showing too much love and care to the other sex. That is, sexism need not be always hostile rather can be benevolent too. This type of so-called benevolent, kind and soft sexism was labelled as Benevolent Sexism by the same theorists cum psychologists, Glick and Fiske. They describe their oxymoronic coinage in detail:

We define *benevolent sexism* as a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy seeking (e.g., self-disclosure). We do not consider benevolent sexism a good thing, for despite the positive feelings it may indicate for the perceiver, its underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance (e.g., the man as the provider and woman as his dependent), and its consequences are often damaging. (491-492)

Although physical violences are not included, Hostile Sexism is also prejudice against women by considering them as manipulative and inferior to men. In another research paper titled, “Hostile and Benevolent Sexism: Measuring Ambivalent Sexist Attitudes Toward Women”, written by the same theorists, Glick and Fiske, a clear-cut explanation is given regarding the term. “*Hostile sexism* seeks to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men’s exploitation of women as sexual objects through derogatory characterizations of women. *Benevolent sexism*, in contrast, relies on kinder and gentler justifications of male dominance and prescribed gender roles” (121). Consequently, unlike hostile sexism, which is evident, benevolent sexism is unrecognizable by most people, including the victims of it. As this new concept

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'benevolent sexism' is sugar coated, its victims never realize the bitterness beneath it; instead, they fall for the so-called over-care and over-love. However, the theorists note in their former research paper:

Benevolent sexism is not necessarily experienced as benevolent by the recipient. For example, a man's comment to a female coworker on how "cute" she looks, however well-intentioned, may undermine her feelings of being (not) taken seriously as a professional. Nevertheless, the subjectively positive nature of the perceiver's feelings, the prosocial behaviors, and the attempts to achieve intimacy that benevolent sexism generates do not fit standard notions of prejudice. (492)

To give more idea on the proposed theory, Glick and Fiske developed a research tool named Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). They explain: "The ASI was developed to tap the three subcomponents hypothesized to make up hostile and benevolent sexism: Paternalism (dominative and protective), Gender Differentiation (competitive and complementary), and Heterosexuality (hostile and intimate)" (495). Using the tool, which is a questionnaire, the approach of society towards both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism was analysed by the theorists. Respondents of the ASI tool, especially women, mostly rejected statements indicating hostile sexism whereas kind of supported the statements that point to benevolent sexism. That was a clear indication that women are not realizing the trap they are already in. This is when the theorists proposed the very theory and emphasized the need of understanding benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is nothing but covert form of prejudices against women which consider them as weak, fragile, incapable and less smart, but cute, beautiful, innocent and dependent. This illogical thoughts about women are caramelized by love and care from their opposite sex, men.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is textual analysis. As the name suggests, textual analysis is nothing but an analysis of a text, in simple terms. "We interpret texts (films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti, and so on) in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them" (Mckee 1). Arya pens, "textual analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text" (1). It generally involves interpreting a text in different angles, analysing its content, understanding the purpose, scrutinizing the style and structure of the text and finally digging up the underlying meanings. Using this methodology, this research paper analyses the various elements of benevolent sexism hidden in the movie, *3BHK*. A very realistic lower middle-class family and their struggles are the ones which constitute the main chunk of the movie. Though seemingly an ideal family of four members without any evident discrimination, violence or chaos, it is not completely out of the clutches of those menaces. Well, at the onset, to get an idea about the selected movie, here describes its brief summary before the detailed analysis.

3BHK

The movie, *3BHK*, tells the story of an average middle-class family living in Tamil Nadu. The family consists of a father, a mother, a son, a daughter and later a daughter-in-law and a grandchild. Primarily, the family is a nuclear one with just parents and their two kids. It is this family's struggle to buy a house for themselves is the main subject of this movie. Moreover, the movie's time periods are set in chronological order from 2006 to 2027.

Vasudevan, a middle-aged man who works at an import-export company, is the father in this family. His wife, Shanthi, who is a home-maker, is the mother in this family. Their son and daughter are Prabhu and Aarthi respectively.

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The movie begins by narrating the state of the family in 2006. At that time, Prabhu and Aarthi are school-going children who often fight with each other, just like any other siblings do. Prabhu is in second year of his higher secondary studies in a private school, whereas Aarthi, who is three years younger to Prabhu, studies in a government school. The family lives in a rented low-cost apartment in a shabby, old and dusty building. By staying there, they start gathering money for buying a house for themselves by saving more amount from Vasudevan's salary and by establishing and running a home-based small-scale business by Shanthi. As months pass, Prabhu passes higher secondary school exam but with low marks. Hence, the entire amount of money saved by family for buying house is spent on Prabhu's college admission.

In 2008, Aarthi completes her tenth grade in flying colours. To save money for family, she decides to stay back in the same government school for her higher secondary education. This sacrifice hurts Prabhu, and his pain is furthermore intensified as he fails pathetically in college semester exams. The family starts to make and save money again. One day, Vasudevan suffers heart attack and thus he is hospitalized. Doctor recommends immediate surgery, for which the family uses the amount they saved for buying house. Afterwards, Prabhu completes B.Tech. and starts attending campus interviews. Meanwhile, Vasudevan loses his job and thus seeks the help of his brother, Murali, for getting a home loan. However, Murali demands Prabhu's job offer letter for loan approval.

In 2012, Prabhu finds a job and as time passes, Aarthi starts working too. They gradually begin to save money for buying a house. Approximately in 2017, a house loan is approved based on their careers. Meanwhile, Murali brings home a marriage alliance for Aarthi from a well-to-do family. Aarthi protests against it, but she is somehow convinced by her family and the wedding happens. Again, the house buying plan gets shattered due to the heavy wedding expense. No sooner, Prabhu's wedding is also fixed against his liking. However, Prabhu calls off the wedding at the last moment after unexpectedly meeting his higher secondary school classmate, Aishwarya aka Aishu at a textile shop. Prabhu decides to marry her against his father's disapproval.

In 2021, Prabhu is leading a happy and satisfied married life with Aishu. However, Vasudevan completely ignores the young couple. Meanwhile, Aarthi loses all her patience in her marital life and at one critical moment, she carries her baby daughter and returns to her own home after suffering discrimination, exploitation and abuse for many years. No sooner, Prabhu resigns from his IT job because he has got more and more fed-up with the dull mundane rat-race. Vasudevan feels dejected as both of his kids are unhappy in life. Anyway, Prabhu and Aarthi decide to move on with their life by taking up Mechanical Engineering studies and job in banking sector respectively.

In 2027, Prabhu works as a reputed mechanical engineer whereas Aarthi continues working in a bank. They together, along with Aarthi's daughter and Aishu, take Vasudevan and Shanthi to their newly bought 3BHK apartment. The family proudly hangs the nameboard 'Vasudevan & Family' in front of their flat. In the final scene of the movie, the family conducts a housewarming ceremony for their new flat. By showing their happy and satisfied faces, the movie ends.

In this study, this movie is critically analysed under the lens of ambivalent sexism theory to see if there is presence of benevolent sexism in this movie or not. Each factor of benevolent sexism is taken and considered separately to examine this movie in detail. Here is the analysis.

Protective Paternalism

Paternalism means treating women like children and believing women always need protection. Glick and Fiske bring in two distinct types of paternalisms: one is dominative and the other is protective, which they

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briefly explain.

Advocates of dominative paternalism justify patriarchy by viewing women as not being fully competent adults, legitimizing the need for a superordinate male figure. Yet protective paternalism may coexist with its dominative counterpart because men are dyadically dependent on women (because of heterosexual reproduction) as wives, mothers, and romantic objects; thus, women are to be loved, cherished, and protected (their “weaknesses” require that men fulfil the protector-and-provider role). (493)

In the movie, *3BHK*, one may not see the elements of dominative paternalism, but protective paternalism cannot be overlooked. For instance, due to the traditional conditioning, most fathers think that only if their daughters are handed over to eligible male partners, they would be safe and secured after their passing. This illogical protective paternalism can be seen in the movie, especially in the context where Vasudevan and Prabhu discuss about whether to buy house or to conduct Aarthi’s wedding. Vasudevan says, “If we can pull this (Aarthi’s wedding) off, Aarthi will be happy for the rest of her life” (1:22:17-20). Subsequently, Vasudevan tells the same to Aarthi and insists on conducting the wedding, which Aarthi refuses.

AARTHI. They (groom’s family) want us to spend extravagantly. Doesn’t it seem wrong to you?

VASUDEVAN. They want us to match their status. That isn’t wrong, dear.

AARTHI. Where will you get the money? Are you joking? ...

VASUDEVAN. This wedding should happen. Listen to me, dear.

AARTHI. Papa, I won’t agree. (1:22:33-54)

Prabhu, who onlooks the scene, drags Aarthi to another room and says, “Aarthi, dad thinks all of us will be happy if you marry this chap. ... Don’t think too much. Just agree to the wedding for our Papa’s sake” (1:23:08-22). Intaking Vasudevan’s words, Prabhu also suggests Aarthi to agree to the wedding, so that her future life would be completely under protection. Apart from such pointless overprotections, there is another issue which is related to protective paternalism. It is the erosion of women’s innate strengths and abilities. As women are needfully or unwantedly protected by men, they merely disuse their potentials and simply follow the lead of men, by considering men as life-guardians.

Complementary Gender Differentiation

Like paternalism, the theorists introduce two types of gender differentiation as well. They are competitive and complementary gender differentiations, which belong to hostile and benevolent sexism respectively. The competitive gender differentiation that gives insane justification for male structural power is not much visible in this movie. Instead, the movie is packed with complementary gender differentiation. The theorists give a lucid explanation for the term, complementary gender differentiation: “Just as the traditional division of labor between the sexes creates complementary roles (men working outside the home, women within), the traits associated with these roles (and hence with each sex) are viewed as complementary” (493). The age-old patriarchal concept, man as provider and woman as homemaker, is the core foundation of the family presented in the movie.

In the initial part of the movie, as soon as the family and its struggles are introduced, there comes a scene where the family decides to amass money to purchase a house, under the strategic calculations of Aarthi. During the occasion, as Vasudevan is the only earning member of the family, Shanthi puts forward a suggestion that she would also earn an amount every month via running a small-scale home-bound business.

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This humble-hearted proposal badly hurts Vasudevan because as any other patriarchal gentle husband, he too believes that he is the who should provide for the family, not his wife. Even a tiny financial contribution by wife makes him uncomfortable as he feels like he has failed as a husband and as a patriarch of the family.

VASUDEVAN. Why do all this? I've said you don't have to work.

SHANTHI. How can you alone struggle to make ends meet? Please. Aarthi is here to help us.

We can somehow get Rs 15000 extra per month. ... It's only for a short time. ...

VASUDEVAN. (He nods and consoles himself.) Only for a short time. (14:49-15:12)

Likewise, in a totally different context, one can see Aarthi becomes a victim of complementary gender differentiation. That is, during Aarthi's marriage discussion, Aarthi clearly states that her priority is buying their dream house than marriage. "Marriage is not in our plan, da ... it's our dream home, da" (1:23:01-24), she begs to Prabhu. But Prabhu consoles her by saying he would take care of it, as if it is his sole responsibility. "I'm there, right? I'll handle it" (1:23:26-29). Prabhu says this mainly due to his societal coaching that he is the next patriarch of the family after his father. Hence, such responsibilities like buying house, running a home, etc. are considered inevitable in his life.

A similar, but brutal, form of coercing of traditional gender role on well-educated smart Aarthi is what we see later on. Around 4 years after Aarthi's marriage, she decides to end her meaningless and useless married life. Hence, she returns to her own home and explains what has happened to her in her in-laws' house. Meanwhile, she recollects, "Soon after I got married, they stopped me from working'. Only I have to do all the domestic chores" (1:48:34-40). This indicates the ancient mind-set of Aarthi's husband's family that a woman's primary duty is to serve her in-laws.

Not only the women, this complementary gender differentiation sometimes has negative effect on men. That is, at least in some occasions, the protector-provider social role acts as burden to men themselves. For example, in the movie, due to the low performance in academics, the school authorities have instructed Prabhu to bring his father for meeting the principal. As a young higher secondary school boy, he obeys the order, without any other option. After listening to the negative comments on Prabhu by school principal, Vasudevan still hopefully says, "(Prabhu) should have a bright future. Even if I struggle, I will make him study well. Our family is dependent on him" (16:59-17:05). Hearing these words, Prabhu's facial expression turns gloomy and pale; a clear look of exhaustion. The same exhausted, hopeless look can be seen on Prabhu's face in multiple occasions.

VASUDEVAN. 'I will try my very best.' What if I am unable to fulfil my dream! My hopes are pinned on Prabhu. 'He is doing his undergrad in I.T. Doesn't matter if I lose. He will win for sure.' That's good enough for me.

PRABHU. I will win, Papa. (44:33-57)

Although Prabhu assures that he would win in life, he is sceptical of his own situation, because he is often getting low grades and failing in exams. Throughout the movie, Prabhu is depicted as a worn-out, tired and frustrated youth who is overburdened with the thought that he is the one who should provide for the family, he is the one who should look after the family and he is the one to whom the family look forward to. Sometimes, the fake pedestal on which men are placed becomes a headache for them.

Heterosexual Intimacy

Like the above concepts, the theorists introduced two contrasting concepts, namely, heterosexual hostility and heterosexual intimacy. The former is out of the picture here as it refers to the explicit toxic side of heterosexual relationship, whereas the latter is taken as the focal point. Although the concept, heterosexual

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intimacy, is primarily indicating the closeness and attachment within a heterosexual couple, there is lot more to it. In most of the so-called happy and healthy marital relationships, idealization of women often happens; that is, the man thinks his counterpart woman is so virtuous, pure and innocent that she should be placed on pedestal, but at the same time, she is fragile, incapable of handling difficult situations and even impossible of escaping from dangers without help and thus needs her man to protect her. This very attitude is so much overt in the movie, *3BHK*. In the movie, both Vasudevan and Prabhu underestimate the emotional and mental strength of Shanthi. At the beginning of the movie, there is a slow scene where the family is observing their newly rented house.

VASUDEVAN. Kitchen is small, no?

SHANTHI. That isn't a big deal.

VASUDEVAN. You'll never say you don't like it, no?

SHANTI. (Smiles.) (03:26-33)

This scene acts as a husband's compliment to his wife for being a kind, gentle and humble lady who never says 'no' to her man. Subsequently, when Vasudevan suffers a minor heart attack and is taken to the hospital by Shanthi, Prabhu and Aarthi, the doctor enquires whether there are adults with them to whom he can share the medical details. Well, as a person who has clearly seen the patient's wife standing there with her kids, why should he arise that illogical question? The reason is pretty clear; that is, he was not actually searching for an adult, instead he was looking for a more emotionally mature person. Well, now arises the second question, that is, why did the doctor think Shanthi, or any wife of any patient, not mature enough during such occasions? Moreover, it is not only the doctor who thought like that, even Prabhu assumed his mother couldn't handle the situation.

DOCTOR. Are there no elders at home?

PRABHU. Only I am there, doctor.

DOCTOR. First (heart) attack. He has 2 minor blocks. He needs a surgery. ...

PRABHU. We'll do it, doctor.

DOCTOR. Good then. Procedure will be explained to you. Sign the consent form, okay? (52:09-26)

Here, Prabhu felt it is crucial time to act more responsible and more mature for his age. Soon after the scene, as doctor instructed, he signs the consent form, without even consulting Shanthi. For a patriarchal world, this is quite natural and it is the right thing to do. But, as we deeply analyse, we understand that these types of benevolent sexism are not true cares for women, rather they are making women weak by giving unwanted supports and favours. The society has taught people that women are intelligently, logically and emotionally weak and hence have to be taken care of. Years long conditioning of such a mentality has even given a wrong impression in women's brain that they are weak and have to act fragile in certain occasions even if they are not. Altogether, both men and women have started underestimating women's true strengths and abilities. In the scene given above, both the doctor and Prabhu clearly underestimated Shanthi.

Romanticizing Women's Dependence

Between a heterosexual couple, society expects the woman to be very dependent of her man than being strong to stand on own foot. Since childhood, women are taught to completely rely on men for emotional stability, whereas men are taught to act more mature than actual age and take full responsibility at any kind of situation. The women are so brainwashed that they themselves romanticize the idea of acting like weakling in front of their partners and proudly uplift their men's position from mutual partnership or spouse-ship to all-

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round guardianship, and in extreme cases, to the level of possessive ownership even. In the book, *A Room of One's Own*, the author, Virginia Woolf, clearly proves how the years-long training works within women in perceiving a man. "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (69). In a patriarchal society, due to the over-respect towards men, women imagine their men as giant inflated superheroes who are capable of anything. This eventually ends in the unnecessary dependence of women on their superficial superheroes.

In the movie, *3BHK*, as the family gradually moves forward with the hope of purchasing an apartment for themselves, suddenly one night, while Vasudevan and Shanthi are having a casual talk, Vasudevan falls from his computer chair due to heart attack. Witnessing the shocking scene, Shanthi runs towards the room where both Prabhu and Aarthi are studying and calls out for her son, without even thinking for a split second that her daughter is also present in the very room like her son. "Prabhu, Papa collapsed on to the floor. Come fast" (51:41-44), screams Shanthi, and no sooner she rushes back to her fallen husband. At this scene, Shanthi unknowingly or conventionally ignores the existence of her daughter. Well, there is nothing wrong in calling specifically someone's name for help, while others also are present. But the question here is, why son's name? There comes the taste of patriarchal pruning; an automatic selection of boy over girl. Since childhood, one is often heard the unofficial rhyme, 'men are protectors and women are to protected'. After living inside this fake patriarchal protective bubble for so many years, at times of issue, one will involuntarily seek the help of a man than woman. Hence, the above mentioned short insignificant scene in the movie, *3BHK*, can be considered as an obvious attempt to showcase that it is the instinctual reflex of a mother to call out for her son during a time of crisis or emergency. Moreover, women have been always taught who their primary protectors are, since the birth of world. "The third verse of the ninth chapter of Manu Smriti explains that women should be protected by the father in childhood, the husband in youth, and the son in old age" (Adhikari 710). No wonder, Shanthi's help seeking reflex worked in a specific direction!

When Vasudevan's heart surgery gets over, he is visited by his family. Shanthi sits next to his bed and gazes at him with love and care. Vasudevan has a casual chit-chat with her and instructs Aarthi to take Shanthi to get her food. As soon as they leave, Vasudevan calls Prabhu near and enquires:

VASUDEVAN. Prabhu.

PRABHU. Papa?

VASUDEVAN. Was it too expensive? ... Tell me.

PRABHU. (Silence).

VASUDEVAN. I asked how much did it cost?

PRABHU. They performed a surgery, Papa. It went well. Papa, the money (garnered for buying house was spent on the surgery).

VASUDEVAN. All my money!

PRABHU. It's okay, Papa. (53:21-54:00)

Discussing financial matters solely within men-circle is a common sight in most patriarchal households. The above scene is visibly indicating the men's common belief that money matters are very complex and complicated for women to handle, and hence should be dealt by them alone. At the worst, women's dependence on men, in financial matters, is often romanticized within the society. Anyway, the hypocrisy in this movie is, in the initial scenes of the movie, one can see, Aarthi wonderfully calculating how to organise money for buying their dream house. It is under her planning, the whole family starts working on gathering the target amount.

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There is an unwritten norm in the society that, whether it is in home, society or nation at large, decisions taken by men are far better and efficient than the ones by women. This unregistered traditional thought might have aroused from an old foolish belief that men are intellectually superior than women. Additionally, in a patriarchal society, most marital alliances have been happened between older men and younger women. That pattern itself became a farmland of so many covert and overt issues in married life; most importantly the power-play between the couples. As men are usually older than women, they give one-way instructions and advices to women. They take decisions and never allow their partner to talk back to them or question their decisions. They assume to be the head and unofficial ruler of the family. Boys who grow up watching their dads ruling and controlling the family, either through force or through care, start imitating the same and finally become the rulers of their own family kingdoms.

When we analyse the movie, *3BHK*, in depth, we can see the main male figures offering life-advices to female co-characters. Men in the movie often take decisions, even about women's personal lives, without consulting the poor women. What is best for women gets usually decided by men. Vasudevan's brother, Murali, brings a marriage alliance for Aarthi and advises her to proceed with it, even if she tries to object it multiple times.

MURALI. For our Aarthi, I have got a good alliance.

AARTHI. I don't intend getting married now, uncle.

VASUDEVAN. Aarthi. Wait, dear. (He turns towards Murali.) Murali, continue.

MURALI. I know the family very well, Vasu. Very well-off, they own a lot of properties in Chennai. They have 3 sons. They are looking for a bride for their 3rd son. 'Money isn't important' they said. All they want is a good girl from a decent family. I showed them our Aarthi's photo. ... Good alliance, Vasu. Don't miss a golden chance when it falls into your lap. Give this serious thought, Vasu. Like our sister Chandra, Aarthi will be well settled too. (1:19:28-20:14)

Here what is best for Aarthi is decided by Murali; later, the same type of decision taking is done by Vasudevan and finally by Prabhu. "Don't question anything. If we can pull this off, Aarthi will be happy for the rest of her life" (1:22:15-18). Because of these so-called good and great advices of men in the family, Aarthi suffers and struggles later on. After four years of marital life, Aarthi returns to own home and opens up to her family about her husband and his family.

You got me married without thinking of anything as they are affluent. That's exactly the problem. Do you know what sort of a family that is? Temerity of being rich runs in the blood of the entire family. Psychos who think the have-nots should be their slaves! ... Do you know why they chose our family? We don't match their status in society! We'll be their slave, that's why. 'Soon after I got married, they stopped me from working.' Only I have to do all the domestic chores. 'In these 4 years, not even one day have I been treated as a family member.' I am an unpaid maid-servant. I have to even wash his brothers' underwear! ... My desires, my dream, all flushed down the drain. Before I knew it, I had a baby. I got cold feet. Nothing changed within those walls. Heart and body - both hurt a lot. (1:48:07-49:29)

People often forget that, no one has the right to take decision on others' life. Before a person becomes an adult, his/her parents can suggest what is right and wrong, because a kid or a teenager may not be mature enough to take the right decision. But as soon as the person becomes an adult, regardless of the gender, the

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society should let him/her go according to his/her interests and freedom. Unfortunately, our society preaches and forces the so-called 'goods and rights' especially on women-folk, every single time. By pitying the mansplaining, Rebecca Solnit, writes,

Every woman knows what I'm talking about. It's the presumption that makes it hard, at times, for any woman in any field; that keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare; that crushes young women into silence by indicating, the way harassment on the street does, that this is not their world. It trains us in self-doubt and self-limitation just as it exercises men's unsupported overconfidence. (4)

Ignoring Women's Existence

Since the birth of world, if there is one category of people who has never been given true recognition, then it is women. As the world has been so partial to them, the women folk simply existed, exists and will exist without realizing what they are capable of and what they are worthy of. They never got any value for their existence; not even a mere consideration as living creature, let alone valuing.

World often discusses about the identity crisis of diaspora people, transgenders, teenagers, outcaste and so on. But, what about the women in a household? They are also suffering from identity crisis; that too not according to circumstances, but every time, everywhere. In this movie, *3BHK*, the cameraperson barely turns his camera to the wife and daughter as if they are not even part of the family, even though the movie is clearly about a 4-member nuclear family struggling to purchase a 3BHK apartment or house. Instead, the movie's camera focus is always on husband and son, which itself is a hidden indication of the traditional patriarchal thinking that a home is made and run by the male members of a family.

Moreover, in most families, the members of the family use patronyms and paternal family names. In this movie as well, things are no different. In a scene, where the family is sightseeing a plot for their future dwelling, Aarathi excitedly asks Vasudevan, what is his biggest wish related to the future house. He reflects on the question for a few seconds and answers, "A board at our gate 'Vasudevan & Family'" (07:26-28). And towards the end of the movie, his wish comes true; a house name board, 'Vasudevan & Family' (2:13:50). Things seem fine so far. But there pops up a twisted doubt; where is Shanthi's representation here? Why is it 'father and family', not 'father, mother and family' nor something else? If this family was out of the clutches of patriarchy, then the house name board would be carrying something like this: 'Vasudevan & Shanthi Home'. Unfortunately, as of now, only the patriarch's name has got a chance to climb up to the board.

Furthermore, in the same context of sightseeing the plot, even though Vasudevan is asked to say what he wishes, Shanthi doesn't even get such an opportunity to tell her wish. Instead, the wordy Aarathi simply imagines that, for a mother the most important thing is kitchen. "A huge kitchen for Amma. Very spacious, modular kitchen" (07:13-17). Aarathi can't be blamed entirely as she is also a victim of the patriarchal training and garbage concept that, 'kitchen is for girls and girls are for kitchen'.

Then comes a context where the existence of Aarathi is completely forgotten, just because she is a girl. For getting a home loan, Vasudevan approaches Murali, but Murali says, "Let Prabhu get a good job. Get me his appointment order. I'll give you the money" (57:32-36). Here he deliberately ignores the case of Aarathi, who is very studious and intelligent, because he also has the conventional belief that it is not Aarathi, but Prabhu who has to repay the home loan and secure the house. The same attitude is what Vasudevan too has. Both these father and uncle figures believe that Aarathi will be married off soon and thus her money and salaries will be exclusively her own and her in-laws. Actually, they are not alone in this kind of thinking, rather they are representatives of every Indian who thinks it is pointless and waste of money and time to raise a daughter.

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Even in this 21st century, a major chunk of parents believe girls are to be given away as soon as they enter into their 20s. No wonder, the number of female foeticides in our nation remains huge!

Despite the insights I got via analysing the movie, *3BHK*, there are so many other things which are yet to get dug out and there is enough space remaining in the movie which can be explored in the future. This movie not merely tells the story of a very common Indian middle-class family, but carries the audience into the depths of various emotions, struggles and confusions the family comes-across. Additionally, this movie is a showpiece of the director's brilliance. Just to substantiate the compliment, here is an example:

(Between Prabhu and Aarthi,) [t]he girl is the better student but this being a typical middle-class household, she studies in a government school to ensure that the boy gets to study in a good private school. He comes first. Under the film's calm exterior, writer-director Sri Ganesh keeps jabbing us with these very pointed points. (Rangan)

With the help of ambivalent sexism theory, I could easily dissect this masterpiece movie into tiny bits and analyse them one by one. From portraying women characters as insignificant beings to slightly glancing into the anxiety of men characters, I could figure out what is truly behind the curtain.

Conclusion

In the movie, *3BHK*, there is a dialogue delivered by the character, Aarthi; which is, "Is it 'violence' only if it's physical abuse?" (1:47:51-52). This is that line which I selected to be the backbone of this study. As the world progressed, people's approach to different things have changed. Nowadays, any sane person can distinguish physical violences from gentle touches of affection, except some psychos. However, to what extent, people recognise other sorts of violences? It remains mysterious, as violence is a wide spectrum and therefore comprehending its light shades are nearly impossible. Benevolent sexism is one of the light shades in that band. It is almost unrecognizable even by its victim group, women-folk. "[W]omen's endorsement of benevolent sexism plays a particularly important role in maintaining gender inequality" (Hammond et al. 215). This very problematic, but seemingly good, benevolent sexism is what dealt in this research paper. Well, using the method of textual analysis, under the lens of ambivalent sexism theory, this study undoubtedly concludes that the movie, *3BHK*, is trapped in the hands of benevolent sexism. At least if the future films what to escape from its trap, the directors must imbibe the true essence of gender equality.

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