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Unmaking The Good Wife – A Deep Analytical Study of the Movie Mrs. (2024)

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Abstract

The film *Mrs.*, released in 2024, arrived at a time when Indian cinema and OTT narratives were re-sketching the very idea of womanhood. For decades, Indian cinema has framed women caught within the domestic life in the roles of caretakers, dutiful wives or silent sufferers. *Mrs.* disrupts that pattern. It does not simply narrate the story of a married woman. It questions the very foundation of marriage as an institution that often silences women. The film becomes an act of negotiation between societal expectations and the desire for selfhood.

This research paper attempts to read *Mrs.* as a cultural and gendered narrative that unmakes the stereotype of the “good wife.” A good wife, in conventional terms, is obedient, sacrificial, and mute to her own desires. But *Mrs.* shows a different trajectory. The female protagonist begins to voice her thoughts. She refuses to remain invisible within domestic space. The film throws light on the power structures through patriarchy within marriage, societal gaze and gendered responsibilities. *Mrs.* is not just a personal story, it gives voice to those who are stuck within the loop of being a good wife and silent sufferers.

The direction and flow of the film is a commendable. At first, the protagonist is depicted forgetting her own identity and treating marriage as her ultimate destiny. When her expectations shatter within the four walls of domestic space, the protagonist through the means of speech, actions and resistance take back control. The language of the film also plays an important role, its silences, pauses, and conflicts reflect the willingness to change the power structure. The narrative of the movie is simple, yet layered. It empowers without making the character unrealistically heroic.

Indian OTT cinema has received a huge boost, where censorship is lighter and female voices are depicted as empowered and more daring. Moreover, its easy and quick accessibility adds to its reach. The paper argues that the film reflects a gradual shift in representation: from woman as a wife to woman as an individual. Thus, *Mrs.* becomes a cultural text that unravels power, voice and the possibility of freedom for women in contemporary India after decades of subjugation.

Keywords: Indian cinema, OTT narratives, womanhood, marriage, patriarchy, gender representation, female agency, domestic space

Introduction

Indian cinema is highly responsible for shaping how the society looks at women. From mythological heroines to Bollywood stars, the image of the woman has been created and recreated for decades. She has been depicted as a mother, goddess, temptress, victim, or wife. But she has rarely been just a woman. Among these roles, if there's something that has stayed constant, it is the role of the “good wife”. She sacrifices her own dreams, forgives easily, and puts her family first, even at the cost of her identity. She suffers quietly and never asks why.

The film *Mrs.* (2024) challenges this image. It does not reject marriage as an institution, but it refuses to glorify the silent suffering that comes with it. The film follows the story of a married woman who slowly begins to see herself beyond the role of wife. What makes *Mrs.* striking is not its plot alone, but the way it places the woman at the centre of her own story. She is not the background to anyone else. She is the protagonist. This shift itself is significant in the Indian cultural landscape, where cinema has always shown women only as supporting characters in men's stories.

The idea of a “good wife” is deeply rooted in culture. In Indian traditions, marriage is often depicted as the ultimate fulfillment for a woman. She is trained, from childhood itself, to be prepared for this role and mainstream cinema, has helped reinforced this belief. From the

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melodramatic mothers of the 1950s to the glamorous heroines of the 1990s, and even the daily soaps of the 2000s, the cycle has been repeated- the woman exists primarily in relation to others. Even when women rebel, they are often brought back into the role of the patient wife. *Mrs.* breaks this pattern. Its protagonist does not stay quiet. She questions, hesitates, and eventually speaks. Her resistance is not loud, but it is steady. Each pause, silence, and small act becomes a way of saying no.

This paper reads *Mrs.* as a story of resistance not through loud rebellion, but through subtle defiance. The protagonist's everyday actions challenge patriarchy in quiet but powerful ways. She begins to exist not just as a wife, but as a whole individual. The protagonist negotiates with patriarchy through everyday gestures- pauses, refusals, moments of hesitation, and finally through speech. These small acts disrupt the idea of the "good wife." In doing so, *Mrs.* becomes a feminist film without using loud slogans.

At the same time, *Mrs.* belongs to a new wave of Indian cinema, shaped by OTT platforms, which provides better creative liberty. In the past few years, many women-centered stories have appeared- *Thappad*, *Four More Shots Please*, *Delhi Crime* etc. These narratives often cross the line that mainstream theatre films hesitate to cross. They talk about marital rape, emotional neglect, casual sexism, and cost of silence.

From a literary perspective, films like *Mrs.* can be read as cultural texts, they carry stories, characters, dialogues, and silences that demand interpretation. The protagonist, Richa Sharma, becomes a site of struggle between power and voice. Michel Foucault's idea that power operates in the smallest units of daily life is visible here. The home, the marriage, the dinner table become spaces of control. When women begin to speak, this smooth flow of authority is interrupted. Her voice becomes a symbol of change.

This research will also look at how the film uses cinematic language to unmake the "good wife." Lighting, framing, and silence are not just technical choices but political ones. When the camera lingers on her face in moments of hesitation, the audience is forced to notice her inner world. In tense situations, the traditional closure where the wife forgives and forgets is not provided. Instead, it leaves the viewer uneasy and that discomfort makes us think.

The cultural relevance of *Mrs.* can also be attributed to its timing. Contemporary Indian society is seeing shifts in conversations about gender. Movements like #MeToo, discussions on marital rights, and rising awareness about mental health have created a different context for women's voices. The "good wife" stereotype feels outdated to many, yet it continues to haunt everyday life. *Mrs.* reflects this contradiction. It shows how women still carry the weight of expectation but also how cracks are appearing in that structure.

The aim of this paper is not only to analyze the film as a story but to place it in dialogue with larger debates in gender and cultural studies. It asks- what happens when a woman refuses to be the "good wife"? How does cinema show that refusal? And how do Indian audiences, used to seeing sacrifice, react when they see self-assertion instead?

The paper argues that *Mrs.* is not just a film about a woman, but a film about voice. A voice that was always there, but muted. A voice that challenges the authority of patriarchy. A voice that makes us rethink the balance of gender and power within marriage.

Literature Review

Indian cinema has always been a mirror for how the society sees gender. Over the years, it has reflected the nation's constant tension between modernity, morality, and tradition. Film scholars have long studied how women are represented on screen- not just as characters, but as symbols of cultural anxiety and moral order.

Lalitha Gopalan, in her work on Indian melodrama, explains that women in films are often emotional anchors. They keep the story and the family together. She argues that the "suffering woman" is not accidental but essential to how Indian films find resolution. This idea is easy to spot in classic films where the woman forgives everyone and sacrifices her happiness for the peace at home. It shows that pain and patience are written into her role.

Shohini Chaudhuri adds that women in Indian cinema are both *visible* and *invisible*. They are visible because their emotions and bodies are constantly shown on screen. Yet, they remain invisible because they rarely control the story. They are seen but not heard. This contradiction defines the "good wife" figure which is always present, but never powerful.

Feminist critics like Shoma Chatterji also point out how women in films are trapped between tradition and modernity. Even when they appear modern - dancing in discos or working in offices, they end up returning to traditional roles by the end of the film. Chatterji calls this "narrative domestication." For example, the bold heroines of the 1990s were allowed to be independent only until marriage. Then, they were reminded that family comes first. This recurring pattern shows how cinema uses modernity as a temporary illusion before restoring the "ideal wife."

However, in recent years, things have started to change, the rise of OTT platforms has opened a new space for storytelling. Meenakshi Bharat argues that streaming services have created room for "gendered subtexts", hidden or subtle feminist voices that mainstream films often avoided. On OTT platforms, women's experiences are shown with more honesty. For example, *Thappad* (2020) and *Four More Shots Please* (2019–2022) openly explore issues like marital neglect, friendship, and consent- topics that would have been considered too risky for theatres.

Anjali Gera Roy also discusses how digital platforms allow more experimentation. She says that the wife figure is no longer sacred or untouchable. She can be angry, dissatisfied, or even walk away. And the film may not punish her for it. This is where *Mrs.* finds its voice. It doesn't shout or protest loudly, but it gently shifts the focus from duty to individuality.

Scholars like Charu Gupta have written about *silence as resistance*. In Indian culture, women's silence is often seen as weakness. But Gupta reminds us that silence can also be a way of saying no, a quiet refusal to conform. In *Mrs.*, the protagonist's pauses, her refusal to answer, or her hesitation carry deep meaning. Her silence is not absence. It is strength.

From a broader cultural lens, Uma Chakravarti's work helps explain how patriarchy works through everyday life. She writes that marriage, family dinners, and household rituals are not neutral spaces, they are loaded with gendered power. The "good wife" is not just a character, but a cultural script. She is expected to serve, smile, and stay quiet. *Mrs.* challenges this script by showing what happens when a woman stops following it.

Nandini Ramnath, a well-known critic, notes that recent films have begun to show women who are not heroes or villains, but simply ordinary people. They make mistakes. They feel stuck. They grow slowly. This ordinariness is powerful because it breaks the myth that empowerment must always look dramatic. The protagonist of *Mrs.* fits this idea. She is not loud or rebellious. She just begins to listen to herself and that simple act becomes revolutionary.

Feminist film theory also connects these ideas to larger global debates. Laura Mulvey's famous concept of the *male gaze* - the idea that women are shown for the pleasure of men has been widely discussed in India too. But as Shohini Ghosh points out, Indian audiences are complex. Female viewers often see themselves in the women on screen. So when a film like *Mrs.* gives its heroine depth and voice, it invites empathy and identification. Women can see their own experiences reflected there.

Another important aspect of this discussion is censorship. Rachel Dwyer and other scholars explain how censorship in India has shaped female representation. Women could be glamorous, but never too bold; emotional, but never angry; strong, but never defiant. OTT platforms have relaxed these old restrictions. They allow filmmakers to explore the emotional and sexual realities of women's lives more freely. Because of this shift, stories like *Mrs.* can exist without being cut down to fit old moral standards.

Together, these perspectives form the foundation for this study. The scholarship shows that Indian cinema is in transition. The old image of the "good wife"- obedient, patient, and silent is slowly being replaced. In its place, we see women who hesitate, doubt, and speak up. Silence becomes a kind of protest. The home becomes a site of struggle. And ordinary women become symbols of quiet strength.

Mrs. belongs to this moment of change. It echoes earlier feminist debates about representation but also benefits from new freedoms of digital storytelling. It challenges old boundaries gently but firmly. By focusing on voice, hesitation, and refusal, the film proves that resistance doesn't have to be loud to be powerful. Sometimes, it only takes a quiet "no" to unmake the myth of the good wife.

Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative approach. The focus is not on numbers or surveys, but on reading the film *Mrs.* as a text. Films, like novels or plays, carry layers of meaning. They can be analyzed for themes, characters, silences, and cultural codes. So the method here is textual analysis combined with feminist film criticism.

The idea is to look at how the film represents the wife. See how she speaks, or does not speak. Notice how the camera treats her, how silence works, how small gestures carry meaning. These details matter because cinema is not only about what is said, but also about what is left unsaid.

Feminist film criticism provides the framework. Scholars from India and outside have shown how women in films are usually reduced to objects of gaze or silent figures of sacrifice. This paper does not apply theory in a mechanical way. Instead, it borrows ideas. For instance, Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" is useful, but in the Indian context it is more important to look at how patriarchy is coded into everyday rituals- marriage, family meals, duty. That is why the analysis draws more heavily on Indian feminist scholars who connect cinema to cultural practices.

The methodology also considers context. *Mrs.* is not just a film released in isolation. It is part of a wave of OTT narratives where censorship is lighter and women characters have more freedom to speak. So the analysis will keep in mind this larger shift from traditional theatrical cinema to digital storytelling. Without this context, the film might look like an exception. We see it as part of a slow but steady transformation.

Close reading is central to the approach. This means watching the film carefully, noticing patterns, repetitions, pauses, and conflicts. For example, when the protagonist hesitates before answering her husband, that hesitation is not random. It is a small act of resistance. The methodology treats such moments as texts in themselves.

Language in the film will be studied too. The dialogues of *Mrs.* are not heavy with slogans. They are ordinary. The power lies in their ordinariness itself. The choice of words, the tone, the pauses, all reveal how the character negotiates her role. The analysis will map these linguistic choices alongside cultural expectations of the "good wife."

Cinematic techniques are another part of the method. Lighting, camera framing, and sound will be studied. These are not just technical details. They are part of the film's politics. When the camera lingers on the protagonist's face in silence, it forces the audience to notice her inner world. When the film avoids melodramatic background scores, it highlights realism. Such choices will be read as strategies to unmake the stereotype of the submissive wife.

The study is interpretive in nature. That means it does not claim to present one "final truth" about the film. Instead, it tries to open possibilities. The reading presented here is one way of looking at *Mrs.*, grounded in feminist thought and cultural critique. Other viewers may read it differently, but that is the strength of interpretive work.

The methodology combines feminist film criticism, cultural context, and close textual reading. It treats *Mrs.* as both an artistic product and a cultural document. By paying attention to silence, voice, gesture, and cinematic technique, the study aims to show how the film unmakes the idea of the "good wife" and reimagines gender and power on screen.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how the film *Mrs.* challenges the stereotype of the "good wife" in Indian cultural imagination.
2. To analyze how silence, pauses, and everyday gestures become forms of resistance in the film.
3. To study how the female protagonist negotiates power and voice within the domestic space.
4. To situate *Mrs.* within the larger shift of Indian OTT narratives that allow bolder and less censored representations of women.
5. To explore how feminist film criticism and Indian cultural theory can be applied to understand gendered narratives in contemporary cinema

Findings

1. The stereotype of the good wife is questioned

For decades, Indian cinema has nurtured the image of the "good wife." She is forgiving, nurturing, and endlessly patient. Her life revolves around her husband and family. Popular films often glorify this sacrifice, making it seem natural. *Mrs.* slowly unpacks this image.. The protagonist begins the film as someone who fits the mold, she cooks and cares, even at the cost of suppressing her own emotions. But

as the story unfolds, her silence becomes unbearable, not only for her but for the audience too. The film does not reward her sacrifices. Instead, it portrays the cost of being too patient. This questioning of the “good wife” stereotype is central. It shows that what was once celebrated is now a burden. And the film places that burden in front of us, forcing us to ask that why should patience be only a woman’s primary virtue?

2. Silence becomes a language of resistance

In Indian cinema, silence has historically been tied to virtue. A silent wife is considered ideal- submissive, respectful, and obedient. But in *Mrs.*, silence takes on a different meaning. The protagonist’s pauses, her hesitation to smile, her refusal to reply immediately all these become acts of resistance. It is not that she has nothing to say. It is that she chooses when and how to say it. Silence, here, unsettles the comfortable patterns of domesticity. The husband, used to her compliance, begins to sense something has changed. The audience also learns to read silence differently. Instead of seeing it as weakness, we begin to see it as power withheld inside. Silence, which is often considered a tool of oppression, becomes a language of protest.

3. The domestic space is shown as a site of power

One of the key insights of feminist theory is that the private is political. The home is not a neutral space. It is where the power is exercised. *Mrs.* illustrates this carefully. The dining table, the bedroom, even the kitchen all become tools of subtle control. The husband never raises his voice. He does not physically harm his wife. But his expectations are constant, heavy, and suffocating. He assumes that food will be ready, that emotions will be managed, that his comfort will come first. The film makes us see how everyday gestures like asking for tea, expecting hot chapati and rejecting the mixer grinder chutney become instruments of power. The domestic space, which is usually romanticized in Indian cinema as a rosy world is exposed as a site of struggle.

4. Voice as agency

The turning point of *Mrs.* is when the protagonist, Richa begins to speak for herself. Her words are not dramatic. She does not use fierce language. But her voice carries weight because it is ordinary. After years of silence, even a small assertion sounds radical. When she refuses, when she says “no,” it lands with force. This finding suggests that agency does not always come from dramatic transformation. It can come from everyday speech, from the courage to speak the truth. The film treats her voice not as background noise but as a marker of empowerment.

5. A new kind of female protagonist

In earlier films, a woman who stepped outside her role as wife was often punished. She might die, repent, or return to her duties after a brief rebellion. *Mrs.* does not follow this path. Its protagonist is not punished for speaking. She is allowed to be confused, flawed, and uncertain. She is not perfect. By presenting her as an ordinary woman with doubts, the film breaks away from the polarized images of the past of either being the “ideal wife” or the “fallen woman.” Here, we see a woman who is neither a saint nor a villain, but simply human. This makes her more relatable, and radical. In showing her imperfections, the film

insists that women do not have to be flawless to be worthy of respect.

6. OTT space as enabler

The significance of the OTT platform cannot be ignored. Traditional cinema halls have often demanded the content that appeals to the “family audience.” This usually means avoiding uncomfortable themes, especially the ones that challenge marriage. Censorship adds another layer, cutting out scenes or dialogues considered “too bold.” OTT platforms like the one hosting *Mrs.* operate under different rules. They allow for more creative freedom. This freedom is what enables a film like *Mrs.* to exist without compromise. It does not have to end with reconciliation. It does not have to silence its protagonist to please the audience. The medium, therefore, shapes the message. The rise of OTT is directly linked to the rise of female voices on screen.

7. Marriage as negotiation, not destiny

Another key finding is how *Mrs.* reframes marriage. Traditionally, Indian culture sees marriage as the ultimate destiny of women. Films have repeated this endlessly. Even independent heroines eventually settle down as wives and mothers. *Mrs.* resists this narrative. It portrays marriage not as destiny but space negotiation. A marriage works only if both partners are equals, if both have voices. The wife is not there to complete the husband’s life. She is there with her own individuality. This shift is subtle but powerful. It does not destroy the institution of marriage, but it demands that the institution change.

8. A feminist text without slogans

Finally, *Mrs.* is striking for its tone. It is not loud. It does not rely on courtroom scenes, public protests, or the exaggerated drama. Instead, it is realistic and quiet. This does not make it less feminist. In fact, it makes it more relatable. Feminism here is not about shouting in the streets. It is about everyday resistance, about refusing to disappear inside domestic roles. By being quiet, the film makes its point louder. Its feminism lies in the small, in the ordinary acts like making herself feel visible.

Through these simple acts, *Mrs.* unmakes the stereotype of the good wife. It does so through subtle disruptions. Silence becomes a means of protest. Domesticity is revealed as political. Voice becomes empowerment. And the protagonist, through her voice, offers a new model of womanhood on screen.

The film also highlights the importance of the OTT revolution in India. Without this platform, such a story might have been softened. With it, the film speaks directly, challenging the audience to rethink marriage, gender, and power.

In the end, *Mrs.* is not just a story of one woman. It is a mirror for many women who live in silence, who hesitate to speak, and feel the weight of expectations. By giving voice to such experiences, the film does what literature and cinema do best, it makes the invisible visible.

Conclusion

The film *Mrs.* is more than a story about marriage. It is about what marriage demands from a woman. It strips down the illusion of a happy home and reveals the silences that live inside it. For decades, Indian cinema carried the weight of tradition. It showed women as wives and mothers first

and individuals later. The “good wife” was depicted as dutiful, quiet and, forgiving. *Mrs.* pushes against this image. It unravels that image, piece by piece.

The findings of this paper show that *Mrs.* gives the female protagonist her own space to breathe, think, and resist. She is not heroic in the larger-than-life sense. She is a human. She feels the burden of cultural duty but still dares to question it. That questioning itself is revolutionary in a society that rewards women for endurance. The film gives her silence a new meaning. It is not passive. It is heavy. It speaks when words cannot. This shift from muteness to a voice, from endurance to refusal is what marks the film as feminist in spirit.

OTT platforms play a key role here. Without the heavy hand of censorship, films like *Mrs.*

explore taboo emotions like anger in marriage, resentment at gender roles, even the desire to walk away. Earlier, such stories were softened or erased. But now they reach audiences more directly. This is not just entertainment. It is social commentary. It invites viewers to think about the roles they play, the expectations they hold.

The narrative also reflects the larger change in Indian gender discourse. Women today do not see themselves only in relation to family. They claim space in work, art, politics, and selfhood. *Mrs.* mirrors this transformation. It stands at the intersection of cinema and society, showing that change is not sudden but gradual. Every refusal, every act of defiance, no matter how small, adds to it.

Mrs. becomes a cultural text that unmakes the myth of the good wife. It presents a woman not as someone bound to tradition but as someone capable of rewriting her own role. For students of English literature and cultural studies, it offers a living example of how stories shape and reshape gender imagination. The film is a reminder that literature is not confined to books. Cinema also carries the weight of narrative. And within it, the voices once silenced are now beginning to rise

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