

# The shadow pandemic and the divine feminine in the diaspora: An analysis of Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth*



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This article engaged in a literary analysis of Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth*, with a specific focus on the shadow pandemic being domestic violence in the Indian diaspora, and on the film's representation of the divine feminine in Indian culture. By using the lens of Hindu mythology, the feminine divine was given prominence. The film centres on the Indian diaspora in Canada. The Canadian diaspora was similar to the South African diaspora through its depiction of Indian and African people living together and experiencing a shared knowledge with specific reference to traditional medicine. Through *Heaven on Earth*, Mehta offered an alternative to hegemonic patriarchal religious depictions and a varied perspective on gender by highlighting the essential role of the divine feminine. The term 'shadow pandemic' denoted domestic violence as a 'pandemic' that has scourged across the world, exacerbated by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an analysis of culture and female divinity, the main female protagonist of the text was able to exit an abusive relationship and enter into her own female power. This feminine agency was an important resource for countless women trapped in abusive relationships.

**Contribution:** The discussion in this article centres on a literary analysis of Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth* (2008) with emphasis on domestic violence and the shadow pandemic with specific emphasis on women of colour in the diaspora. The analysis also makes use of a cultural lens to discuss both the snake and androgyny in diasporic Indian culture providing a counter-stance to patriarchy. This research can be utilised by hermeneutists of suspicion and specialists in the field of public theology.

**Keywords:** African traditional medicine; androgynous; domestic violence; Indian diaspora; goddess; shadow pandemic.

'It is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora and displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.'

Bhabha (1994:172)

## Introduction

Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth* (2008) sheds light on the Indian diaspora in Canada, foregrounding the lived reality of Indian females in the Indian diaspora, reflecting the lives of women of colour in the diasporas which are scattered across the globe. The discussion in this article uses the lens of Hindu mythology, which places the female at the centre of Indian culture, to depict how women of colour in the diaspora are able to attain agency and power, through an analysis of the divine feminine.

The main female protagonist of the film is 'exiled' as she is sent away from her home to be married in another country. This exile exposes her to the horrors of domestic abuse, isolating her in an unfamiliar environment, away from those who truly care for her. Despite this, she is able to use her faith and culture as a means to break free from this abuse, and this 'exile becomes the necessary precondition to a better state' (Said 2006:441). Using a cultural and religious lens, 'Moses, Mohammed and Jesus' are examples of exile (Said 2006:441). These cultural examples have played the most significant role in forming fundamental religions and cultures, especially Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

**Note:** Special Collection: African Women, Pandemics and Religion, sub-edited by Sophia Chirongoma (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe) and Linda Naicker (University of South Africa, South Africa).

Domestic violence lies at the heart of the narrative and Hindu mythology is used to combat it on the part of the main female protagonist. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light another pandemic – the shadow pandemic. Domestic violence and its impact on women of colour, with specific reference to women of colour living in the diaspora, is discussed through placing women at the centre of Hindu culture. The main protagonist also makes use of African traditional medicine while in the diaspora to improve her marriage and living conditions. The snake and the image of the serpent features prominently in the narrative as it provides a link to an androgynous representation of the Godhead.

Although some aspects of Indian culture work to oppress women, being in the diaspora demonstrates the resilience of women of colour to overcome their challenges through utilising the same culture that once resulted in their oppression. Through focusing and analysing certain aspects of Indian culture and mythology, such as the worship of the Great Goddess, culture has the power to act as a liberating force for women both inside and outside the diaspora.

## Synopsis of the film

The film follows the journey of Chand, an Indian female, who travels from India to Brampton to marry Rocky Dillon. For Chand, this physical journey is overshadowed by the spiritual journey that she embarks on, charted by the narrative of the film. Rocky is the breadwinner in his family, and the film conveys that this economic pressure results in the constant abuse of his wife. Each time Chand is brutally beaten, her longing to return home intensifies. After each instance of abuse, Chand narrates a fantasy story revolving around a mythical cobra that rescues her from danger and reunites her with her mother.

While working at a textile factory, Chand encounters Rosa, a Jamaican immigrant from the African diaspora. Upon learning that Chand is a victim of domestic abuse, Rosa offers Chand a root given to her by a traditional healer, which will make a wife desirable to her husband. While Chand crushes the red root in a pestle to administer to Rocky, a chemical reaction takes place, and she is forced to discard the potion in the backyard. Chand unknowingly pours the concoction into a hole in which a cobra resides.

The cobra takes the physical form of Rocky and spends time with Chand. This version of Rocky is the antithesis of the actual Rocky. He is loving, empathetic and kind. When Chand reveals to the tenants that she is unwell and with Rocky in her bedroom, the family, along with the real Rocky, accuse her of infidelity. To prove her innocence, Chand must endure the snake ordeal by placing her hand in the hole in the ground, removing the snake and taking an oath by it to prove her innocence. The narrative seems to suggest that Chand is unaware that there are two versions of Rocky as she is desperate for his acceptance and love.

## Women of colour and domestic violence in the diaspora

While gender-based violence is a global phenomenon, within South Africa, the statistics are shocking,<sup>1</sup> with the country having one of the highest levels of domestic violence in the world (Britton 2006:146). With specific reference to South Africa, gender-based violence and domestic violence have been:

[E]xacerbated by the violence of apartheid, the social consequences of the migrant labour force, and the impact of patriarchal authority, violence against women has become one of the most visible and destabilising vestiges of this complex history. (Britton 2006:145)

The film, *Heaven on Earth* (2008), specifically sheds light on domestic violence perpetuated on women of colour who are living within the diaspora. Canada contains an Indian diaspora and so does South Africa. The women of colour, from the diasporas, share lived experiences when confronted with violence that takes place within the home and from within the family unit. It has been noted that ‘research on issues concerning domestic violence in immigrant communities remains limited’ (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:898).

Chand, an Indian woman who migrates from India to Canada, is not only an immigrant but a representative of the Indian diaspora. There are ‘specific factors [*which*] exacerbate the already vulnerable position – as dictated by class, gender, and race – of immigrant women in domestic violence situations’ (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:899). Indian women ‘are among the most vulnerable groups for DV victimisation globally because of systematic gender, economic, and social inequalities’ (Stephens & Eaton 2020:3).

The perception persists that:

[D]omestic violence among immigrants is inherently a part of their culture – and thus nothing can be done about it – but also that domestic violence is higher among immigrants because they import it with them. (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:902)

This discourse contributes to a lack of action on the part of the community and officials to assist women who are victims of domestic violence. Some cultural frameworks endorse and support domestic violence within the home, from spouses and family members. Violence is used to ‘correct or punish a woman violating gender roles’ and this ‘may be viewed as appropriate for those valuing specific frameworks of respect for family and culture rules’<sup>2</sup> (Stephens & Eaton 2020:15).

The move from India to Canada isolates Chand from her family and exposes her to the wrath of the Rocky. Initially,

1. It was reported in 2022 that globally ‘27% of women and girls aged fifteen and older have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence. In South Africa this figure is a shocking one-third or even up to 50%’ (Brits 2022:Online). Marital rape ‘occurs in as much as 60 per cent’ of relationships (Britton 2006:146).

2. This practice is not unique to the Indian community. In the Asian migrant population of New Zealand, men reported ‘using control over their wives as a last resort to protect their cultural values and traditions’. Similarly, rural Kenyan women ‘describe wife beating as a form of discipline by the husband out of love for his wife as being accepted among some traditional family members’ (Stephen & Eaton 2020:15).

Chand believes that she will have a better life in Brampton, but this could not be further from her reality. When she arrives in Canada she struggles to adjust to her new life. Chand belongs to a middle-to-upper-class family in India, and she is educated as she is a graduate with a certificate. Chand arrives in Canada as a mail-order bride. This practice was 'created by men in industrialised countries to marry docile and domesticated women from lands where more orthodox gender relations are still the norm' (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:906). In such instances:

[M]en expect these women to accept a submissive and subordinate role in marriage. In addition, the bride is often on her own for the first time, in a foreign land where her support base is non-existent, which increases her vulnerability and isolation. (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:906)

Chand is objectified, dehumanised and treated like a package when she arrives in Canada. Upon seeing Chand for the first time at the airport, Rocky's mother remarks, 'Look what came for Rocky from India' (Mehta 2008, *Heaven on Earth*, 2008, 6:40–6:43). Chand's isolation from her family and confinement in the diaspora ensure that she is not able to respond to being abused in any significant way. For Chand, then, culture determines 'how women experience violence, how they name it, how they seek assistance – if at all' (Massaquoi 2005:35). Chand's culture dictates that she must marry and therefore she must leave her home to venture to that of her husband's. This isolation ensures that 'it is easier for men to control women's lives both emotionally and physically' (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:904).

When Chand first arrives in Brampton, the female family members (her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law) turn a blind eye towards the abuse that Chand experiences at the hands of her economically frustrated husband. Rocky's mother remarks, 'This is normal married life' (Mehta 2008, *Heaven on Earth*, 2008, 27:56–27:57), and Chand's sister-in-law, Aman also condones the abuse when she says, 'In our community we deal with problems in-house' (Mehta 2008, *Heaven on Earth*, 2008, 31:57–31:58). Aman confines the problem of domestic violence to the home and the family unit, allowing the violence to continue without outside intervention and assistance for Chand. The women in the family collude with patriarchal culture by protecting Rocky – their son and brother. Rocky's place in patriarchal culture is highlighted through his name which foregrounds hegemonic masculinity through its reference to the iconic Rocky Balboa, depicted through the Rocky franchise (Stallone 2006). This reference serves to place emphasis on the severity of violence enacted on Chand's female body.

## Domestic violence in the age of pandemics and African traditional medicine in the diaspora

In South Africa, 'women who are victims of violent sexual conduct, such as rape and other forms of violent sexual abuse, have in part contributed to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS

infections among women' (Fagbadebo 2021:95), and this has resulted in a recorded 4.7 million human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and/or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) cases among women from a total of 7.7 million South Africans (p. 95). This is directly related to the further oppression and subjugation of women.

The term shadow pandemic emerged amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic to describe the exacerbated abuse of vulnerable individuals during the numerous and restrictive lockdowns that took place globally in response to the pandemic. Chand's vulnerability is foregrounded due to her state of 'exile', and her isolation as an immigrant is akin to the isolation experienced during various levels of lockdown<sup>3</sup> across the globe, and more specifically, in South Africa. While 'people of all races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, socioeconomic classes, and religions experience' domestic violence in some form, 'such violence has a disproportionate effect on communities of color and other marginalised groups' (Roa 2022:151–152). The 'gross under-reporting of gender-based violence, particularly in the family setting, is a phenomenon in virtually every country globally' (Massaquoi 2005:35).

Rocky is predisposed to acting violently, particularly towards his wife (as he thinks he owns her) because of the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity encouraged and perpetuated by the other women in the family. He therefore feels it appropriate and acceptable to beat his wife. He is forced to work both in the day and throughout the night to support his extended family and be able to sponsor other families, from India to Canada. As the narrative progresses, Rocky's financial burdens and frustrations increase. This results in Chand experiencing more violent and frequent abuse. It has been observed:

[V]iolence is most greatly exacerbated by poverty with black women and women of colour often being the most marginalized. It is further compounded in environments of economic inequality between men and women where women lack decision-making power, and where there are restrictions on the women's ability to leave the family setting due to racial, cultural or linguistic barriers within society at large. (Massaquoi 2005:39)

For the purpose of this analysis, pandemics and violence against women are linked in three significant ways. Firstly, the pandemic exacerbated 'economic insecurity and poverty related stress' aggravated by the pandemic situation (Peterman et al. 2020:5). In Chand's case, she is thrown into the depths of poverty due to joining an extended immigrant family. The COVID-19 pandemic increased poverty in South Africa and 'this rocked an economy which was already in recession', giving 'momentum to a poverty pandemic' (Van de Merwe 2020:1). Secondly, the pandemic further exposed 'exploitative relationships due to changing demographics' (Peterman et al. 2020:5). In Chand's scenario, she is exposed to an abusive family and a violent husband, with no family to support her. Her position as diasporic, Indian, and female marginalises her further upon her arrival in Canada. Thirdly,

3. The term lockdown encapsulates the measures that numerous governments adopted which include 'closing down their borders, shutting down business activities, restricting international travelling, and local movement of people' (Aborisade 2022:1).

there is the 'inability of women to temporarily escape abusive partners' (p. 5). For Chand, her newly diasporic status ensures that she is unable to escape Rocky and his family, as well as ask for assistance from authorities. These factors place women, and especially women of colour, in a vulnerable position, open to domestic violence and attack from their partners and the people they live with.

Rocky ensures that Chand gets a job to contribute financially to his needs. Chand begins working in a textile factory, even though she is educated with a degree.

A professional woman who is not fluent in the host-country language may end up working in a factory [...] which poses negative consequences for her and her family in the long run as they often stay in those jobs for a long time. (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:903)

Desperate to stop the abuse from Rocky, Chand takes the advice from Rosa, whom she works with at the factory. A study has found that 'immigrant women establish informal networks quite effectively' (Menjivar & Salcido 2002:902). Rosa, who was abused in Jamaica by the man that she loved, consulted a traditional healer who gave her a root that would make her desirable to her lover. Chand, desperate to stop the beatings and to share a loving marriage with her husband, takes the root from Rosa and makes use of the traditional medicine. Based on their culture and socialisation, both Rosa and Chand believe that the abuse is somehow their fault – that something is wrong with them, and they must be responsible for 'fixing' their relationships with abusive men. Like Rosa, Chand desires healing for herself and her marriage, and healing 'has been consistently deployed to fight against the systemic racism and sexism that has pervaded and continues to persist in the lives of African diasporic subjects' (Gallego 2019:68). Through making use of traditional medicine, both Rosa and Chand, as women of colour in the diaspora, use 'spirituality to enact survival and resistance strategies in order to cope with the hardships visited upon them due to racist and sexist discriminatory practices' (p. 76). Both Rosa and Chand have 'striven for a greater understanding of spirituality that can guide their lives, and themselves as spiritual beings' (p. 76). As a diasporic woman of colour, Chand is 'poised at the intersection and interstice of other cultures' and as a result she is subjected to 'dynamism and evolution' (Naficy 2001:22).

## The snake in Christianity and Hinduism

The snake, in the form of a cobra, is of significant cultural value to the narrative. Chand's desires manifest through her actions of pouring the potion into the cobra's home in the backyard. The cobra takes on the form of Rocky and fulfils Chand's wish and desire of being loved by her husband. The cobra not only fulfils her desires, but also acts as a catalyst for her emancipation from the abusive Dillon family.

The symbol of snake has contradictory meanings when compared to the beliefs of the East and the West. The

'serpent symbolism pervades human culture' (Charlesworth 2010:37). In Western culture, the 'serpent as snake, is a pejorative image [...] especially among Jews, Christians, and Muslim' (p. 2). In 'Western traditions, the serpent stands for chaos, evil, death, and the forces of destruction, and it must be conquered and cut to pieces in order that the cosmos may survive' (Bassuk 1987:186). The snake and serpent 'lore in the Judeo-Christian tradition has its origin in the Garden of Eden' (p. 186), as the 'snake that deceived Eve and Adam and introduced sin and death into creation' (Charlesworth 2010:2). This 'ancient serpent' is the 'Devil and Satan' (p. 2).

Contrary to these sentiments, there is a long history of serpent worship [*naga*] worship in India (Dimock 1962:311). Indian serpent lore emanating out of India makes numerous references to snakes and *nagas*. The race of *nagas* 'may occasionally assume human form, but they do not belong to the human world' (Vogel 1995:3). The race of *nagas* belongs to the '*nagaloka*' – the realm of the snakes (p. 3). In some legends, the *nagas* 'usually exhibit a bewildering blending of human and serpentine properties' (p. 3). Snakes are worshipped in India for their resemblance to 'deities of the waters, springs and rivers' as they symbolise the 'waving form of the serpent' (p. 6).

In keeping with portraying snakes in an alternative, positive light, the film *Heaven on Earth* (Mehta 2008) depicts the cobra as the protagonist to Chand's husband, Rocky. When the cobra takes the form of Rocky, he is depicted as compassionate and caring towards Chand. His characterisation lies in direct opposition to the actual Rocky who abuses his wife frequently and brutally.

When Chand is asked to prove her innocence in the face of being accused of adultery, she is initially filled with terror. The family force her to endure the snake ordeal. If she is bitten then she will die from the venom, but if she is innocent, then she will not be bitten. Chand bravely pulls the snake from its cavity in the ground and says, 'Since coming to Canada, I've only touched two males [...] one is my husband [...] and the second is this cobra' (Mehta 2008, *Heaven on Earth*, 2008, 1:35:00–1:37:42). Chand wraps the cobra around her neck and thus evokes the image of Lord Shiva with his snake coiled around his neck (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The iconography that is depicted relates directly to Lord Shiva who is the only God in the Hindu pantheon that is able to embody androgyny thereby breaking gender barriers and crossing gender boundaries, with the potential to equate the power that males and females hold through culture in society.

## The androgynous Shiva and the goddess

In Hinduism, there is 'recognition of a bipolar image and/or idol' and this offers an 'alternative and inclusive image of divinity' (Goldberg 2002:10), as opposed to Western traditions. This androgynous form is depicted by Lord



Source: Vas, A., 2022, Connection Between Consciousness & Maya – Part 24, viewed n.d., from <https://www.yesvedanta.com/24-brahman-maya-connection/>

**FIGURE 1:** The figure clearly shows the cobra coiled around Lord Shiva's neck as well as *Ardhanarisvara* which aptly differentiates between male (Shiva) and female (Shakti).



Source: Mehta, D., 2008, *heaven on earth* [Film], Hamilton – Mehta Productions Inc, Ottawa

**FIGURE 2:** Chand wraps the cobra around her neck and evokes the image of Lord Shiva with his snake. The tell-tale signs of the physical abuse that she had to endure are evident on her face.

Shiva as *Ardhanarisvara* [The God who is half man and half woman].

When Chand drapes the cobra around her neck, she evokes the general iconography of Lord Shiva. The only difference being that Chand is female while Lord Shiva is male. Lord Shiva in an androgynous form<sup>4</sup> *Ardhanarisvara* depicts him as half male and half female (see Figure 1). To study and analyse this form, being one of the 'most popular

4. Goldberg (2002:1) questions whether the image of Shiva as *Ardhanarisvara* is a 'positive emancipatory ideal for women' since the Sanskrit word translates to 'Lord who is half woman' (p. 10), still giving preference to the masculine through the usage of the word 'lord'. The film under discussion explicitly foregrounds the importance of the feminine divine as Chand takes on the iconography of *Ardhanarisvara* but does so with and through her female body. Goldberg (1999:177–178) also argues that the female half of *Ardhanarisvara* is privileged because it exists on the right side of the depiction while the female half is present on the left side. In Hindu tradition, the female first occupies the left side of her male counterpart through a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony. As a counter argument to this I would suggest the understanding being the feminine resides on the left side, closest to her partner's heart. When worship of the image or idol takes place, the worshipper observes that the female side falls on the right and the male side on the left.

images of Siva' (Goldberg 2002:1), is to also 'look into the ways Indian tradition considers gender' (p. 2). Shiva, in an androgynous form foregrounds a 'state of consciousness' whereby 'the radical duality of binary thinking, and the pain engendered by it, collapses in successively absorptive stages until complete and total unity is achieved by the self' (p. 3). In the image of *Ardhanarisvara* lies 'mystery and fluidity of organic singularity' (p. 3). The representation of a God as half man and half woman allows for the possibility of female depiction and representation within Godhead.

When Chand evokes *Ardhanarisvara*, her gender as female is given prominence and the fluidity of the representational image is highlighted. By the end of the film, having achieved such a state of divinity, she is able to break free from the abusive relationship and walk away from Rocky, both physically and emotionally. Her female power and agency are highlighted in the last scene of the film when Rocky demands to know who she was speaking with and she says, 'Not to you' (Mehta 2008, *Heaven on Earth*, 2008, 1:40:41–1:40:43) and walks away from Rocky, never to return. Since Chand takes her passport with her, the assumption can be made that she returns home to India – to her mother and the mother land. Chand leaves her abusive relationship with newly gained power and agency. *Heaven on Earth* (2008) falls into the category of 'accented cinema' (Naficy 2001:127). The focus being on 'daughter texts' (p. 127) with an emphasis on the relationship between mother and daughter. Such texts foreground the mother–daughter relationship, giving prominence to the daughter, while the mother is 'marginalised, often silenced' (p. 229). In such texts, every 'journey entails a return, or a thought of return' (p. 229).

Hindu culture embodies the necessary ingredients to be deemed a matriarchal culture as numerous 'hegemonic narratives' centre on the 'great goddess' (Kakar 1989:135). She is the Mother – the nurturer and simultaneously the destroyer – the slayer of demons. Goddess 'worship has been an important dimension of Hindu religious life for many centuries, and the Hindu goddess tradition is one of the richest, most compelling [...] traditions in existence today' (Pintchman 2001:1). *Ardhanarisvara* embodies 'god and/or goddess as polarised into the divine active (Sakti) and the divine inactive (Siva)' (Goldberg 2002: 4). Indian traditions, 'which includes among its diverse theological expressions, a bipolar god and/or goddess offers women and men images of the divine reality that orthodox, male, monotheistic traditions do not' (Goldberg 2002:10).

Within Indian culture (in India or in the diaspora) pandemics and diseases bear a feminine form as the 'tradition of diseases goddesses is ancient' through the representation of the 'mother goddesses who have been protecting their devotees from diseases such as smallpox, fever, [and] plague' (Yadav 2022:1). The contradictory nature of this goddess and her association

with pandemics are explicitly seen in her benevolence and her malevolence (p. 3). The goddess can be the embodiment of the disease and therefore can 'inflict as well as revert the disease' (p. 4), or she can 'protect [*by reverting it*] her followers from the disease' (p. 4). The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic saw the creation, emergence, and worship of Corona Mata,<sup>5</sup> a goddess who specifically represents and whose worship is believed to prevent the virus from harming her devotees. The appearance of such a goddess 'can be understood as the result of challenges faced by those faithful who create their deities as a means to address the challenges of their time' (p. 10). The form of the feminine divine is utilised as an embodiment of a powerful pandemic, and it is looked upon for protection from the ravages of diseases and sickness.

## Conclusion

Chand and the abuse that she endures from her husband is representative of the many women of colour in diasporas across the globe, who also find themselves victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence. The film sheds light on the shadow pandemic – a pandemic that has been sidelined since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the case of the Dillon family, their immigration was conducted to attain a better life financially. The family instead live in poverty because of the financial burden being placed on the eldest son, Rocky. During the course of the narrative, Chand's father-in-law states, 'Hell is better than a heaven with no dignity' (Mehta 2008, *Heaven on Earth*, 2008 1:43:21–1:43:23), as the poverty that the family experiences weighs heavily on all the members of the family. For Chand, this remark has a dual meaning. Chand manages to break away from her abusive situation and attain her agency and dignity, as a woman of colour, living in the diaspora.

Chand's ordeal and 'diasporic identity demonstrate the extent to which identity itself must be constructed and reconstituted by individuals in their everyday lives' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2006:426). Chand's diasporic identity undergoes transformation through her experience with divinity and embodying the powerful female aspects that Hindu culture has to offer.

The cobra and the manifestation that it takes become the catalysts for Chand's self-actualisation. The snake in Western culture symbolises the temptations of evil but in the film and through the lens of Hindu mythology, the snake becomes the embodiment of transformation, agency and freedom for the main female protagonist. Chand, through her interaction with the cobra, finds the courage to leave her abusive marriage and embark on her own journey.

The image of a Lord as half man and half woman inferred through the images in the film serves to equate the genders of male and female (especially within the confines of heterosexual

5. Corona Mata takes the iconic imagery of the Hindu goddess and adapts its representation to depict a female goddess wearing a sari with the colours from the flag of India and a surgical mask. In her ten hands, she holds hand sanitiser, a mask, a stethoscope, a vaccine, a medical aid kit and a chain that contains the virus, signaling that she has the virus under her control.

marriage). The image in the film shows the potential for the destabilisation of the patriarchal order and this image can be applicable to society, especially those that are inclusive of diasporas, and the Indian diaspora, more specifically.

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The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

## Author's contributions

S.L., is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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