

Chandala - The impure
An appropriation of William Shakespeare's
The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

by Koumarane Valavane.



Crédit : Philippe Liezi.

Honour Killing is a despicable practice linked to the caste system in India that inspired this adaptation. I first wrote a short story before writing the play. This stage writing was nourished by the visions of all the actors who participated in the creation of the show and then its revival.

The play was originally written in Tamil. Later it was translated in French by Koumarane Valavane and Marine Cormorèche and in English by Srijita Kar Chowdhury.

The Short Story¹

At the pinnacle of purity are the Brahmins, followed by the Ksatriyas— the warriors. Below them are the Vaisyas— the merchants, and finally the Sudras— the servants. As a fifth category, we must include those deemed completely impure to touch—the untouchables. They are excluded from everything due to their potential to contaminate the purity of places, the air, objects, and people.

—Excerpt from an ancient book, very ancient and very wise.

The eleven o'clock screening is often dedicated to the so-called Malayalam films, but in reality, it contains erotic content. We call them Malayalam films because these small erotic extracts are added to Malayalam-language films during editing.

The cinema hall – a rectangular building topped with a tin roof supported by a metal frame – is divided into four sections: the box and the balcony placed separately on the first floor, then the first class with recliners with sagging pad support, the second class with reclining chairs but no padding, and finally, the stalls, with nothing but dirt accumulated in front of the screen.

The toilets are separated.

After ten minutes of an uninteresting Malayalam film, the long-awaited erotic scenes in sepia colour begin. The alibi film then resumes its course, and hands emerge from dhotis. The screening progresses with screams, groans, insults, and the heavy silence of the viewers. The enticing title, racy image, and large letter 'A' on

¹ Originally written in French by Koumarane Valavane, translated in English by Srijita Kar Chowdhury. Thanks to Cordis Paldano for his valuable suggestions.

the poster (A means restricted to adult audiences, according to the Censor Board) follow, but the obscene excerpts remain the same: bare breasts, men in heat, pubic hair, but no scenes of penetration or images of penises.

I sit with my uncle on the floor, in front of an enormous breast distorted by proximity, with a man in the background breathing suggestively. My uncle leaves for the toilets and returns. It is my turn to go. He sits, blowing the last smoke from his bidi, and asks me,

“Do you want to fuck a virgin?”

The swinging door suddenly lets in blinding light, causing the image to pale. The room hurls, *The door!* and some insults. I quickly slip out. The earth seems to exhale like the man on the screen. In the toilet, I hear the dialogues of the camouflage film. I masturbate vigorously, imagining my promised virgin.

When I return, silence reigns as the erotic scene resumes. The smell of the sweating man almost pierces the screen, and the dense hair on the armpits raised above the breasts does not strip off the general excitement. I sit down quickly. My uncle whispers in my ear,

“She is a Brahmin.”

I shudder, a mix of sexual excitement and immemorial fear. He adds,

“You will be paid.”

That worries me a little.

“Three thousand rupees.”

We must leave before the end to avoid meeting the spectators of the two-hour session — a romance story in sappy water. Students fleeing the boredom of classrooms, a few lovers seeking privacy, and singles hoping for love generally attend.

We quickly leave with our heads bowed.

Around three in the afternoon, my uncle informs me of the meeting place and slips a bottle of arak into my hand.

“One of their servants will be waiting for you”, he says.

He stops me in my tracks.

“Don’t back out. They will kill me.”

Seeing my hesitation, he continues, “There will be no problem. I have already explained everything,” he insists, pushing the bottle into my hand.

Brahmin women are very beautiful, fair-skinned, always wearing white saris with wide gold borders. I can’t approach them; I have to keep a certain distance. Sometimes I dream of one and ejaculate, but I’ve always feared being caught and beaten or lynched. But this is work, paid work, work worthy of an untouchable.

“Drink the bottle but don’t masturbate on the way,” he warned. “Drink the whole bottle,” he insisted.

Normally, I can’t take the main road of the village and approach their neighbourhood more than ten metres. They have certainly prepared an enclosure in one of their farms, the furthest from their home.

A huge rounded stone marks the entrance to the village, a protection against the *dark*. A slender man, who was certainly at the eleven o’clock session sitting in second class, is waiting for me.

At my sight, he begins to walk, and I follow him at a distance. Huge containers of water are being set up along the passage. A few untouchables harvesting rice with their feet in the mud look at me with contempt. Our system of divisions and subdivisions with subtle differences in impurity has developed nuanced shades, allowing dogs to bite each other. They do not bite me because I am invited by their master to his daughter’s honeymoon. I am supposed to deflower her!

I stop, finish the bottle, and throw it into a fallow field, the fine shards ready to notch into the master's faithful dogs. I derive pleasure from it.

We pass a plantation where a few men are slicing down the first banana trees at the base.

He reaches a large gate, signals me to stop, and enters the farm alone. The pedigree dog, with its muzzle against the crosspieces, stares at me, comfortably lying behind the base of the house. The wealth of this family, situated at the height of purity, is evident in everything it owns, including the size of the pedigree dog. Two banana trees along the gate spoil the peaceful atmosphere.

Preceded by an old servant, I advance towards an enclosure behind the servants' dwelling. The dog follows at a walking pace and at a safe distance, the last element of this absurd hierarchy.

She leads me through a stable to a small dwelling. She stops, the dog stops. We are there. She signals me to enter.

A terror seizes me as at the end of my erotic dreams—the fear of being lynched, the dread of a rat allowed to enter the lion's cage, to fornicate with the lion cub under the hateful gaze of the pack held on a leash by a simple and fearsome belief: *no virgin soul can cross the threshold of the afterlife*. As the price to pay for their excessive purity.

She locks me in with a young virgin. She is lying on a bench.

At first, I see her heels sculpted in minerals. Her big toes, slightly wrinkled, are tied by a piece of black fabric. The folds of her sari collapse in the hollow of her legs. Her hands rest on her lower abdomen with care. Her white sari reveals her white blouse through its translucent layers. Her conical breasts seem frozen. I dare not look at her face. Nearby is a stool, the glass reserved for untouchables, filled, I suppose, with water.

The bulb is fading. My uncle asked me to hurry.

I don't have much time. I uncover her chest to cover her face. I inhale fine particles of spices projected into the air. The fabric reveals a yellowed face, covered in turmeric. I undress, realising that I won't be able to deflower her on this narrow bench. She might fall, so I spread my dhoti on the ground and lay her on it, afraid that the poorly cemented floor will hurt her.

Terror sets in. I can't spread her legs; she resists me. I panic like a trapped rat. *How can she resist me?* It took a while to see her toes tied. I stop, a little out of breath but reassured. A few drops of sweat fall on her stomach. I look at her. No reaction. Of course. I wipe her belly, then release her toes. I spread her legs, lift her sari, and pull up her skirt to her pubis. She is incredibly attractive. I unbutton her blouse. Her breasts look dazed by their fate. I don't understand why I take so many precautions in this state of intoxication, fear, and ambiguity.

I kiss her tits, unable to get hard. I move to a corner and masturbate, thinking of the woman on the screen. I breathe now like the man in the background of the scene. I stare at her young virgin body and penetrate her with great difficulty.

The impurity of death and the impurity of birth finally mix their blood.

I quickly put her body back in place because the old woman starts knocking at the door, hurling insults at me. I leave, ashamed. I spot some bills under a stone, she is far now. I follow her to the small gate.

"You took too long," she reproaches under the threatening gaze of the pedigree dog. "Are you new?"

"Yes. Usually, it's my uncle."

"Five more minutes, and they would have lynched you."

I lower my head.

"If you talk about it..."

“Yes, I know, he warned me.”

As we talk, the men set up the two banana trees against the pillars, declaring the mourning. I set off alone, walking hastily. Behind me, I hear the conch blowing. I speed up. When I reach the banana plantation, the water poured along my path overtakes me.

The banana plantation, now completely mutilated, seems to express a certain desolation.

The Play

Characters

Jack, a student of English literature.

Mas, Jack's friend.

Gana, Jack's friend and shopkeeper.

Janani, a young deaf student.

Janani's father.

Janani's mother.

Aya, a Tamil term that can mean mother, grandmother or trusted servant. Here, she is a distant cousin of the mother, a trusted servant.

Dheena, Janani's cousin.

Sakthi, Dheena's sister.

Cupid.

Mama, Jack's uncle.

KATHIR, friend of Mas, Gana and Jack.

DATTA, friend of Dheena.

CHOTE, friend of Dheena.

Group of friends.

Two killers.

Author's Note: All the songs used in our version of the play were chosen by the actors, according to the situations. Thus, it is up to directors and actors to choose the songs. Only a few necessary inclusions were translated.

The Voice of Kausalya. *My name is Kausalya. I was 21 when I met Shankar at university. Shankar was a dalit.² My parents, belonging to a high caste, opposed our relationship and wanted to force me into an arranged marriage. We ran away and lived together for eight months. At the beginning of the ninth month, fearing I was carrying the child of a dalit,³ my parents sent men to kill us. On 13 March 2016, while we were out buying a shirt for Shankar, they surrounded us as we were leaving the store, beat us, and tried to kill us. Shankar died, but I survived.*

² Dalit means oppressed in Sanskrit, it corresponds to the untouchables of the caste system in India.

³ Chandala is a term also used for an inter-caste child.

The Prologue

*In beautiful India, where our scene unfolds,
lives a very old demon who feeds solely on hatred.
Seated on his throne, varnished with sacredness,
he has divided the world into four colours:*

*At the pinnacle of purity are the Brahmins, followed by the Ksatriyas —
the warriors. Below them are the Vaisyas — the merchants, and finally the
Sudras — the servants. As a fifth category, we must include those deemed
completely impure to touch — the untouchables. They are excluded from
everything due to their potential to contaminate the purity of places, air,
objects, and people.*

*An angel no bigger than a butterfly
Will face this eternal demon
Nimble on his wings, he will harass the demon with his arrows
He is Kama, the Cupid
Tonight we will offer to the insatiable appetite of this monster
two mythical lovers: Romeo and Juliet
renamed as Jack and Janani
The death of countless lovers has never
buried with them in their tomb the hatred of castes
because the monster has cleverly broken himself in pieces
and hidden them deep inside our hearts.
For the next three hours, if you lend us a patient ear
we will play for you the story of Jack and Janani
We will make love flow through your heart
to cleanse the pieces of this monster
and our zeal will fill the void with Anandha.⁴*

⁴ According to *Natyasastra*, the Indian Classical Treaty of Theatre, all plays should conclude with the state of Ananda, felicity. It implies a happy ending to all stories. The author ponders on the idea of Anandha being the concluding state of the play, and thus, questions with his ending why it should not be the final state of the public.

Act 1

Scene 1

*A funeral ceremony for a deceased young man is being held.
The deceased wakes up and sings. Everyone starts singing with him.
Sakthi walks past the group of boys, she is waiting for the bus to go to
high school.
Jack calls out to her while singing.*

Jack. Sakthi, I'm Jack. You know when I first saw her, I was buying the book of *Romeo and Juliet*. It was a sign.

Jack tries to approach Sakthi to talk to her. The bus arrives, Sakthi rushes to the bus so that she doesn't miss it and drops a letter while running.

Jack picks up the letter and starts reading it aloud.

Jack. Oh, you handsome stranger with the grey and blue bike! You follow me every day, like a shadow. You smile, but never say a word. Can I know who you are? Call me tonight at 5 p.m. I'll wait. Sakthi.

Cupid enters.

Cupid. Love, Kaadal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour,⁵...

Mas & Gana. It's Cupid!

Cupid. Love, Kaadal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour,...

Cupid, Gana, Mas and Jack dance and sing together.

Gana. It's only 10 o' clock now!

All. It's only 10 o' clock now. We're to wait for her till 5 p.m.

Everyone is dejected.

⁵ The word "Love" in different languages.

*Cupid turns the hands of the public clock. It is now 5 p.m.
Cupid plays the instrument. Jack, Mas and Gana dance.
Jack calls Sakthi.*

Jack. Hello, Sakthi? It's Jack.

Mas. Put the speaker on, put the speaker on!

Jack puts the loudspeaker on, and we hear Sakthi's voice.

Sakthi. Hello Jack.

Jack. Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs⁶...

Mas. Sir Jack goes to university, so he flirts in English!

Jack. I stole these lines from Shakespeare.

Sakthi. I don't know anything about you, tell me a little about yourself.

Jack. What do you mean you don't know me? How can I talk about myself? I am yours now, tell me who I should be and I will become it for love.

Sakthi. My family is very traditional.

Gana. And we have no traditions, tell her.

Jack. Is there any tradition older than love?

Sakthi. Yes, the caste system. What is your caste?

Mas. She talks about caste? Give her a good reply!

Jack. But Shakespeare wrote nothing about caste. Sakthi, the blind Cupid who guided my senses, never cared about my caste, my religion, or my race. So why are you talking about it?

⁶ *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1.1.187).

Sakthi. My family's honour, my parents' consent, and my virginity are more important than love.

Mas. The girl doesn't understand anything about love, I am leaving.

He exits.

Jack. Sakthi, look, you have already bewitched me. Even your parents cannot change...

Sakthi. I swore to my parents that I will only marry a man of my caste... Are you of my caste?

Jack. I really love you Sakthi!

Sakthi. Just answer my question, what is your caste?

Dheena. Sakthi!

Sakthi. Yes, my brother.

Dheena. What are you doing?

Sakthi. I'm on the phone.

Dheena. Who are you talking to?

Sakthi. A friend...

Dheena. A girl or a boy?

Sakthi. A boy...

Dheena. Give me the phone. Hello! Who's there?

Jack. Jack.

Dheena. Where are you from?

Mas snatches the phone from Jack's hands.

Mas. From Ambedkar Colony.⁷ Do you have a problem with that?

Mas and Jack leave the scene.

Gana and Cupid approach the phone to listen.

Dheena. Are you talking to a boy from the colony? They didn't send you to college to talk to boys. And you Jack, instead of working hard to become someone, you are trying to seduce a high-caste girl. Listen to me, we are the ones who feed others, and you, the ones who beg in front of us. You want to marry one of our daughters? We won't let you! We'll finish you off in your mother's womb.

Gana. Mas! Jack!

Dheena. And you, who are you? His accomplice? So, you hang around in a pack! You know well what happened to that couple, Shankar and Kausalya, no? The same thing will happen to you: you won't be allowed to live!

Scene 2

Cupid tries to rekindle the flames of love with his arrows. Gana and Aya are hit simultaneously. A seduction scene begins between them.

Janani's mother and father enter the scene, surprising Aya and Gana in their seduction act.

Aya. You have the rice, and I have the rice husk...

Cupid rekindles the flames of love in Janani's father with his arrows.

Janani's mother remains unmoved by his advances.

Janani arrives with Sakthi.

Aya. Janani is here with Sakthi!

⁷ Ambedkar, the father of the Indian constitution, is a famous dalit leader. The term colony refers to the place where dalits live. These areas are often named after Ambedkar.

Janani's mother and Aya dress her in a beautiful saree.

Janani's father. When my daughter Janani was born, people told me: It's a girl! You'll only have trouble. Then you grew up and they realised that you couldn't speak, so they asked me: How will you marry her off? Despite everything, I raised you with great care. When you were 18, I didn't force you to get married, I even sent you to university! Today you honour me by marrying Ranjith, a chemical engineer in Paris, from a famous family of our caste.

He exits.

Aya. Do you remember Ranjith? Your cousin, the Paris boy. The little bell! The old people decided to marry you to him.

Janani's mother. Janani, come here.

Janani, distraught, enters the house.

Her mother and Aya follow her.

Scene 3

Dheena comes with his gang and provokes Gana.

They scare away Cupid.

Datta pushes Gana towards Dheena.

Dheena. Gana! Who is Jack? He is harassing my sister, that dog. I know he is like you, from the colony. Tell him to be careful. Otherwise the same accident will happen to him as happened to that couple, Kausalya and Shankar.

Gana. It was not an accident, it was honour killing.

Dheena. If a surveillance camera had not filmed everything, no one would have known anything about this story. There are more than hundreds of honour killings every year here, and there are no surveillance cameras on every street corner.

Datta. What is honour killing? If I kill you, is it honour killing or an act of honour? But if you kill me, it would be a crime of dishonour.

Gana. If your sister is having sex with a dalit, and you kill them in anger... You think you have saved your honour?

Datta. Oh, I understand. Chote, leave me. Jack wants to flirt with his sister but we have sworn to save our honour. Who is Jack?

Gana. It's not Jack, it's Romeo.

Dheena. Then we are anti-Romeos. Mister Shakespeare, if your Romeo approaches our sister Juliet, this is what will happen to him...

The images filmed by the surveillance cameras during the attack on Shankar and Kausalya are screened.

Scene 4

Jack enters.

Jack. They say love is blind, believe me, it's true. It leads you to a dead end. Gana, what happened here? A fight? What fight? No, no, don't tell me, I know everything. This has a lot to do with hate but even more with love. The love of caste or the caste of love.

Mas enters.

Mas. Jack!

Jack. Young boys and girls of the colony! Don't fall in love. If you fall in love, check the caste of the other because the other may reject you, as I was rejected.

A man comes to stick a movie poster on the wall.

Mas. Hey Gana, come and see this poster of the movie. There's a Shakila movie coming out tomorrow!

Gana. Great! Let's take Jack with us! It'll take his mind off things.

Jack. No Shakespeare, no Juliet. My tragedy will be shorter: sitting here, I'll sing my sorrow until death takes me and of this shop, you will make a tomb, a monument of love.

Mas and Gana take Jack with them.

Scene 5

Janani appears at the window.

Janani.⁸ I don't want to get married or experience love, I just want to study.

Janani's mother arrives.

Janani's mother places a cloth on her daughter's shoulders, it is the cloth for wedding dresses.

Janani. What's the matter?

Janani's mother only responds with movie songs.

Janani's mother. *(singing)*

*In this beautiful night sky,
your star and my star have appeared together...*

Janani. I don't want to get married now.

Janani's mother. *(singing)*

The water from the pitcher is pouring...

Janani. No, I want to finish my studies before getting married.

Janani's mother. *(singing)*

*Listen my friend, my sweet friend,
your heart is lost somewhere...*

⁸ Janani uses sign language throughout the play, unless indicated otherwise.

Janani. I have already spoken to Ranjith. We will get married in two years.

Janani's mother. (*singing*)

*Suffering after suffering again, this heart sighs.
You have punished me for love.
What crime have I committed?
I am destroyed, oh yes, I am destroyed...*

Janani's mother. (*In sign language*) Why did you speak to him? What if he changes his mind? Don't forget that you are deaf. You must be married this year.

Janani. But I don't feel anything right now.

Janani's mother. (*In sign language*) So much the better if you don't feel anything. Love will come after marriage.

Janani. You were married very young, I don't want that. You got pregnant young, I don't want that. And since then you have spent your days in the kitchen. I don't want to be like you. Your heart has become hard as stone.

Janani's mother exits, singing.

Janani. What I said, wasn't that important? I just said that I wanted to get married after I finish my studies. But they don't want to hear anything. If that's how it is, I'll find myself a lover and run away with him! Even today, I received a love letter. So, I'm going to start loving him. And I'm going to run away with him.

Janani takes out a letter, she reads it.

Cupid appears.

Janani goes to get the box containing all the love letters she has received.

Janani. All these are love letters that I have received. What use are they? I have never felt love.

She takes out a letter⁹ and opens it.

The lover's voice 1

My eyes play with your femininity
that no hand has yet touched...
Oh flower bud, come and bloom on my chest.
Oh Janani, my body burns, soothe me with your tenderness.
Hey Janani, I love you!

Cupid chooses another one for her.

The lover's voice 2

Oh moon, stop your indifferent course,
for your heart is of stone.
Wounded, I get drunk on wine,
answer me at last.
This is the fifth letter I write to you
and you do not deign to answer me.
You even avoid my gaze.
How arrogant!
You made me cry more than laugh,
you know neither love nor heartache.
You are not likely to know them, because you have no heart.
Heart of stone! You are not worthy of love!

Janani. My heart is hard as stone, so what?

Cupid runs away.

Scene 6

Janani. I don't want to get married or experience love. I just want to study.

Aya and Sakthi appear at the window.

⁹ All the letters are inspired by movie songs' lyrics.

Aya. First, we need to create the right ambience for her to feel the desire of marriage. Look!

*Aya and Sakthi lead Janani in a sensual dance.
Janani's father enters.*

Janani's father. Aya! What's that noise? Janani, will you come down?

Janani, followed by Sakthi, joins her father.

Janani's father. Janani, come. Your mother has already decided the date of the engagement. Ranjith is coming next week from Paris especially for that.

Janani. No, no, I beg you.

Janani's father. I can't do anything. What do you want? To finish your studies before marriage? Talk to Ranjith. Both of you discuss and decide together the time that suits you for the marriage.

Sakthi. Uncle, we've finished the semester, we'd like to go to the cinema.

Janani's father. Yes, yes, you have my permission to go out. Take Aya with you.

He exits.

Sakthi. But what fun are we going to have with Aya clinging to us!

Aya emerges from the window.

Aya. Hey! Residents of Vaishnava¹⁰ Nagar! Ranjith and Janani are getting married!

She and Janani hug each other.

Janani. I will never leave you.

¹⁰ As per the Indian caste system, Vaishnava is a high cast. Thus, here it depicts high caste area.

Sakthi. Aya, can we go to the cinema?

Aya. Oh great! (*Pointing to the poster stuck on the wall*). What if we go to see an erotic film?

Sakthi. But we can't go.

Aya. Janani is getting married, she must know these things! Shakila, my sister, will help your flowers to bloom!

Sakthi. It's impossible, only men can go.

Aya. So we will go disguised as men.

Janani. As boys!

Scene 7

Mas and Jack enter the movie theatre.

Jack. Can morning dreams come true?

Mas. Yes, why?

Jack. This morning I dreamed that I was dead, angels surrounded my body and cried...

Mas. What is this dream? I also had a dream: I was watching a Shakila film, when she saw me, she tore the screen and approached me, then she put my head on her chest and then our desires came true in the dream. And you, are you dreaming of death and angels?

Jack. I have a premonition, my soul will soon leave my body and fly away to the sky. My life like a ship on the waters will soon plunge into the abyss. Oh! The boatman is waiting for me. Happy! let's go on a trip.

Gana enters.

Mas. Hey, Gana! Come to first class!

Dheena comes in.

Dheena. Hey Gana, go sit on the floor!

Mas. Why would you go sit on the floor? We paid for first class tickets! Come sit here.

Dheena. Just because you can afford first class tickets doesn't mean you and I are equal. Your seat will always be on the floor, in front of the screen.

Mas. Get lost or I'll smash your skull in.

Dheena. You're getting excited because you're with your gang, but the day I find you alone, I'll take care of you!

Dheena comes out.

Mas. Hey, go on, start the movie.

The erotic movie starts.

Mas. Hey! Gana! Why are you leaving again!

Gana. Sitting in the front, then I can see everything bigger!

Aya, Janani and Sakthi enter. They are disguised as men.

Mas. Hey, big guy, get out of there!

Aya. Asshole, go away!

Jack doesn't watch the movie anymore.

Janani tries to leave the room.

Mas. Hey! Get out of the way.

Janani finds herself next to Jack.

Mas, excited, moves closer to the screen.

Janani brushes against Jack. Jack pulls Janani towards him, he kisses her ankles, and then they meet each other face to face.

Jack. If I profane with my unworhiest hand, this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.¹¹

Janani. I am mute, I speak with my hands.

Jack. Oh! Your hands are your lips? Let me kiss them first. Take my mute hands, teach them to kiss...

Janani kisses his hands, his arms. Carried away by her desire, she bites Jack.

Janani. Forgive me, I bit you. My mute lips do not know how to kiss.

They kiss.

Jack. (*in sign language*) Your kisses have taken away my voice. Give me back my voice.

They kiss again.

The film ends.

Mas. Jack, come on, let's go.

Jack. What's your name?

Janani writes her name.

Janani. And you?

Jack. Jack.

Aya. Janani! Janani!

Jack runs away.

Aya. Janani, you're here. What's this movie? We never see them naked! Come on, come on.

¹¹ *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1.5.92).

Janani. Who are these boys?

Aya. They're from the colony. Come on.

Aya heads for the exit. Janani stands still.

Aya. What's wrong? Did he touch you?

Janani nods.

Aya. Where?

Janani holds out her hand. Aya wipes it. Janani shows Aya different parts of her body, Aya wipes them. At the end, Janani shows Aya her mouth.

Aya. Did he kiss you?

Janani. No, I kissed him. And I feel happy!

Janani rushes towards the exit.

Aya. Janani! Wait for me! Janani!

Aya exits.

The trailer for Ajith Kumar's¹² upcoming film is playing on the screen.

Scene 8

Gand's shop. Jack listens to the radio.

The voice of Love Guru. You are listening to Radio Amour 93.1 FM, listen, listen, keep listening. I am Love Guru. Divya has loved Savee for six years. The family opposes their love: the caste difference is the obstacle. Divya is forced to marry her cousin. In this difficult situation, Divya asks me: 'Tell me, Love Guru, what should I do?' Divya, if for six years caste was not an obstacle, and suddenly it becomes one, nei-

¹² A famous actor of Tamil cinema.

ther I nor anyone else can help you. Only you know your feelings, the decision is in your hands. I am sorry Divya. You are listening to Radio Amour 93.1 FM. Listen, listen, keep listening. Let's take another call.

Jack. Hello! Love Guru?

The voice of Love Guru. I'm listening to you.

Jack. This is the first time I've tried to call you and I managed to get through to you.

The voice of Love Guru. You are lucky. Who are you? Where are you calling from?

Jack. I'm Jack, calling from Villupuram.

The voice of Love Guru. Share your love story with us.

Jack. Love Guru, I love a young girl passionately. I don't know when and how I will see her again. I do not know what to do.

The voice of Love Guru. How long have you two loved each other?

Jack. I met her this morning.

The voice of Love Guru. What? And can we know her name?

Jack. I can't say her name here but I gave her another first name: Juliet.

The voice of Love Guru. Oh! Like Juliet in Shakespeare's play, what a beautiful love story!

Jack. Love Guru, can I send her a message via your show?

The voice of Love Guru. Of course.

Jack. Hello, Juliet? It's me, Jack! Do you remember? We met at the cinema hall this morning. Since I saw you I haven't stopped thinking about you. My heart is pounding at the thought of seeing you again and talking to you. Juliet, I hope you listen to this show. I'm sure

you're listening to me. I need to see you, just once. I need to hug you and kiss you. Tonight, at 11p.m., I will wait for you under your balcony. Will you come? But, do you have a balcony? Yes, I'm sure you have a balcony. I love you Juliet!

The voice of Love Guru. Thanks Jack. May your love story succeed. Dear listeners, continue to confide in Love Guru on Radio Amour 93.1 FM. Before taking another call, I invite you to listen to the sighs of a lover...

The radio is playing a romantic song.

Scene 9

*Jack enters looking for Janani's balcony.
The bells ring at eleven o'clock.*

Jack. Janani! Janani! There you go, this is Janani's balcony. It looks like the balcony of *Romeo and Juliet*, the same balcony. Under this same balcony, I am waiting, she will arrive soon, we will meet again and kiss each other again. Janani, come, come, let's kiss...

Jack waits under the balcony but no one appears.

Jack. She won't come. I don't even know if she heard me on the radio.

He moves away.

Jack. If she comes when I leave. I'm not going to leave. I'm going to stay here until dawn. Janani, I won't leave without seeing you. I'm going to count to five, if you don't appear on this balcony, I will enter your house no matter what. One... Two... Three... Four... Four point one. Four point two. Four point three. Four point four. Four point five. Four point six. Four point seven. Four point eight. Four point nine...

Aya appears.

Aya. Who are you?

Jack. I'm Jack.

Aya. From which neighbourhood?

Jack. Ambedkar colony.

Aya. Ambedkar colony? I wouldn't even give you my own daughter. Go away!

Jack. As in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is Janani who must appear on the balcony, not you, in fact you do not exist.

Aya. And who plays Juliet's nanny, your mother? I didn't come to see you, I came to pee. Go away.

Jack. I'm sure she will come, I'll wait. By love, that first did prompt me to inquire¹³...

Aya. What trash are you talking? I do not understand.

Jack. It's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Aya. Oh, it's *Romeo and Juliet*, huh? Tell, tell.

Jack. By love, that first did prompt me to inquire.

He lent me counsel and I lent him eyes.

I am no pilot. Yet, wert thou as far

As that vast shore washed with the farthest sea,

I should adventure for such merchandise.¹⁴

Aya. I always dreamed of playing Juliet. Oh Romeo, my Romeo. Come. Kiss Me.

Jack. No.

Aya. Do you want to see Juliet?

¹³ *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (2.1.122).

¹⁴ *he Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (2.2.122-126).

Jack turns away from her.

Why are you looking there? Do you really believe that we are in the story of Romeo and Juliet, that Janani will appear in her nightgown, with her hair down under the light of the moon? It's impossible! Silly! Here we are in India! If anyone sees you here, you're dead. The balcony is not there. It's under my saree. Do you want to see my balcony? Come.

Aya lifts her sari, Janani appears behind the transparent veil of her skirt. Jack approaches Janani to kiss her. Aya threatens him.

Janani. Jack! Why are you Jack? Denounce your caste and abdicate your name; or, if you do not want it, swear to love me, and I will no longer be Janani. The caste system alone is our enemy. You are not a dalit, you are yourself. What is a dalit? It is neither a hand, nor a foot, nor an arm, nor a face, nor anything that is part of a man... What is in a name? What we call a rose, would be as fragrant as now under any other name. Jack, renounce your name; and in place of this name, which is not part of you, take me whole.¹⁵

Jack. Okay, I'm changing my name. From now on, I am Romeo.

Janani. And, from now on, I am Juliet. What were Romeo and Juliet doing during the balcony scene?

Jack. They didn't speak. They kissed...

Janani. Aya! Just one kiss, please...

Aya. Come under my balcony. Hey Romeo, don't touch what's never been touched.

Lovers hide under her saree.

Aya sings.

We hear the rooster crowing. Aya runs away.

¹⁵ Janani is adapting Juliet's speech in Shakespeare's scene of the balcony, but she still uses sign language.

Scene 10

We are in the Ambedkar colony area. Mama is crouching over the sewers.

Mama. Oh dear goddess Kali, I have to go down inside to unblock.

Jack enters.

Jack. Mama, I met my angel, she told me: I love you and I want to marry you. Cupid pierced my heart.

Mama. So, finally Sakthi said yes, eh?

Jack. Sakthi? Huh! Already forgotten!

Mama. You've already met another girl!

Jack. Yes. Yesterday. I met her at the cinema, at the erotic film screening.

Mama. What? She went to see an erotic film? And you like this kind of girl?

Jack. Don't say bad things about my darling, Mama. She's made of pure gold! Last night I managed to see her in front of her house and she kissed me.

Mama. What? You have gone to her house and kissed her? You're right, this girl is gold.

Jack. It's not over! She suggested that we run away and get married. I told her that I can't do anything without knowing my uncle's opinion!

Mama. Now you need my opinion but to kiss her on the balcony... Go, go, go!

Jack. Mama, stop joking. If you saw her, you would say she was made for me. She is so beautiful! Her eyes are like stars... Her lips are like swimming dolphins...

Mama. Tell me who is this girl.

Jack. Janani.

Mama. Nice name. Where's she from?

Jack. From here.

Mama. From here? Which neighbourhood?

Jack. Vaishnava Nagar.

Mama. Vaishnava Nagar?

Jack. Jack and Janani. Sounds nice, no?

Mama has disappeared to the bottom of the sewers.

Jack. Mama, where are you? What are you doing? Get out of there.

Mama. Vaishnava Nagar! At least let me save my life!

He disappears again.

Jack. Mama? Where are you going again?

Mama. I'm going to Vaishnava Nagar.

Jack. Oh! Are you going to propose to my darling?

Mama. No! I'm going to work, there are clogged toilets there. Hold on! Are you free now? Come here. Take off your shirt. Take this stick. Here, go unclog these toilets. I have to go back, I haven't eaten yet.

Jack. What, Mama! I ask you to help me marry Janani and you send me to unclog the toilets in her neighbourhood... Don't forget that I have a Master's degree in English literature.

Mama. English or Indian literature, for them we were born to unclog sewers. We can never change it. Except for one day in the year, when I play Kali during the village festival, that day they consider

me a goddess and they all pray before me. But every other day of the year, I'm the one who has to pick up their shit.

Jack. I swear on Goddess Kali that I really love her! You are my guide! It is you who must unite us.

Mama sings a prayer to the goddess Kali.

Mama. *(Singing)*

To our ancestors! To our ancestors!

Our knowledge, our senses are limited.

I implore the millions of gods and goddesses to unite us in love...

Scene 11

Mas, Gana and Jack accompanied by a few friends return from a funeral ceremony. They play the parai¹⁶ and dance.

Mas. Cousin! Where are you going? We're all singing and dancing, why don't you join us? It's me, Mas. I'm calling you, get out of there.

Jack leaves the house.

Jack and Mas compete in dance.

Jack hits Mas.

Mas. He's my friend, he has the right to beat me.

Jack. Do not touch me.

Mas. What? I'm not allowed to touch you? What's your problem?

Jack. Why did you bring me with you? I don't like this job.

Mas. There were not enough of us for the funeral ceremony.

Gana. I told you not to call him.

¹⁶ Instrument associated with funeral rites.

Jack. I don't like this work that we do. Since the time of fathers, now to sons.

Gana. These are high caste funerals. Hands full of money and mouths full of alcohol.

Jack. They fed the deceased ten times and we have been playing since the morning and when we ask for water, they tell us: "Go and drink from the public fountain!"

Mas. When he was still alive, there were thousands surrounding him, once he died, no one is left! Hey cousin! Even his family won't be there anymore. Who accompanies him till the end? We do! It is us who burn his body while singing and dancing, so that the deceased leaves joyfully. We should be proud of this work.

Jack. I will be dead soon, burn my body and fill your pocket with four thousand rupees.

Gana. What are you talking about?

Jack. I say that I don't like this work. Degrading, discredited, humiliating...

Mas. Refuse to do this work? But it's not me who decides. When I was in primary school, my father showed me what a funeral ritual is. He died when I was in high school, and I performed the funeral rites for him. It didn't start with me. My father, my grandfather, my ancestors, have always done this work associated with our caste. Cousin, this instrument is our protector, our god. Today it's me, then it will be my son and all his descendants who will do this work...

Jack. You are right: the son of the one who picks up shit, can only pick up shit. The son of the one who burns bodies, can only do this job. Even if we have a first-class seat at the cinema, we will still have to sit on the floor. How can we get rid of this system dictated by the great sacred book of Manu?

A Friend. He is becoming paternalistic like Gandhi. He will end up like him, calling us Harijans.

Jack. The Brahmins are born from the head of the creator, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his legs, and the Sudras from his feet. And us? Where do we come from? The ass! We are the Chandalas! The damned!

Gana. I don't know about you but I was born from my mother's womb.

Mas. Okay, we do as you say, we abandon this work. We know how to sing, we know how to dance. What can we do with it?

Jack. Perfect! Let's make our voices heard. We just have to start a music group.

All. What? A band?

Mas. You're the one who wants us to change, so give our music group a name!

Jack. Let's pay tribute to all lovers, call our group Romeo music squad.

Jack begins to sing.

Aya enters.

Mas. Hey Gana, do you *jilko*¹⁷ with Aya?

Aya. Get out of here, you swine! Shut your mouth! Jack, come here. Who are these people? Your friends?

Jack. No.

Aya. You drink?

Jack. No.

¹⁷ A slang word in Tamil meaning having a sexual affair.

Aya. You smoke? Beware! Janani, I carry her in my heart! If you play with her feelings, I'll kill you!

Jack. I really like Janani...

Aya. Show me how you walk. Since I am giving you my daughter, I must examine you. Walk like a hero.

Jack complies.

Aya. In the other direction.

He turns around.

Aya. Stop.

Jack stops in front of Aya.

Aya. Raise your arms.

Aya approaches Jack and touches his arm.

Aya. You have pumped up your biceps, huh...

Mas. He's going to the gym!

Aya. Oh he goes to the gym? Look up!

Jack rolls his eyes, Aya takes the opportunity to pinch his crotch.

Jack steps back, stunned.

Aya. Everything is in its place. You all want me to check...

The group of friends run away.

Jack. I spoke to Mama. He agreed to arrange our wedding in secret.

Aya. All right.

Jack. Tomorrow morning we will get married in Pondicherry.

Aya. All right.

Jack. Don't forget to join us with Janani.

Aya. All right.

Jack. Aya? You understood?

Aya. All right.

Jack kisses Aya.

Mas enters.

Mas. I want to kiss you too...

He kisses Aya.

Aya. If I hit you, your balls will go right up into your mouth!

Scene 12

It's Jack and Janani's wedding day.

Kathir plays dholak.¹⁸

Mama enters in a Rickshaw.

Mama. *(Singing)*

Let's go celebrate Jack and Janani's wedding.

Two florists enter singing.

Mama. Here are the florists! Come on the rickshaw.

They get into the rickshaw and decorate it with flowers.

The song continues.

Mas enters.

Mas. *(Singing)*

Oh! My friend, don't fall in love.

That is like putting your head on the railway track...

¹⁸ A musical instrument.

Gana. Do you think it's time to sing that?

Mas. What should we sing then?

Jack comes out of the shop singing.

Jack. *(Singing)*

Come out of the painting and stand before me, my love.

It is my destiny that you come before me, my love...

Everyone sings with Jack.

Mama takes Jack in his arms. Jack joins his friends in the rickshaw.

Aya enters playing the parai.

All. Aya!

Everyone starts dancing to the rhythm played by Aya.

Aya and Mama are singing.

Mama. When Janani is here, all of you must reach Pondicherry. I will be waiting for you all there for the wedding.

He goes out.

The singing continues.

Jack. Aya, Janani is still not here?

Janani enters.

Janani sings in sign language.

Aya translates the lyrics of Janani's song.

Janani joins Jack.

The singing continues.

Cupid appears.

With the exception of Jack and Janani, everyone leaves the stage.

Cupid gets on the rickshaw and drives Jack and Janani.

Cupid. Love, Kaadaal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour...

Act II

Scene 1

Inside the cinema hall.

Day of the premiere of Ajith Kumar's film. Celebration begins.

Jack and friends enter and dance.

Dheena and friends enter and dance.

Dheena pushes Mas roughly to the ground.

Dheena. In Shakila's film, you were being smart because you were with your gang. Come on, let's settle our scores now.

Mas. In Shakila's film, you ran away like a coward. There are 200 of us who have booked our seats in first class, we're going to sit in first class and we'll see what you're going to do!

Jack tries to intervene.

Mas. Leave me alone, Jack.

Dheena. Are you the one who was talking to my sister Sakthi on the phone?

Dheena tries to hit Jack but Mas intervenes.

Mas. How dare you attack my friend in front of me?

They all start dancing again.

The film starts.

Dheena comes back and stops Mas from sitting in first class.

Dheena. Go ahead, sit on the floor.

Mas. Why should I sit on the floor? I'm going to the first class.

Dheena. Dare sit in first class now! You are destined to sit on the floor.

Mas. You guys only have your caste in mind...

Jack. Don't look for a fight. Sorry, brother.

Dheena. Don't touch me! Do you think you're Romeo? Look what I'm going to do to you!

Dheena pulls a knife out of his pocket.

Dheena's friends try to hold him back.

A Friend. He has a knife in his hand!

Mas. Just because you have a knife doesn't mean you can use it.

Dheena rushes at Jack. Mas steps in and gets stabbed.

Mas is injured.

Dheena and his friends run away.

Gana and Jack approach Mas to help him.

Mas. I will not die without seeing *Thala's* film!¹⁹ *Thala*, my hero, my absolute idol, *Thala*!

The hero of the film appears on the screen.

Ajith Kumar (*on the screen*). If the whole world opposes you, no matter the situation, if they all scream at you: you are not defeated. Not defeated, as long as you do not accept your defeat, anywhere, anytime, no one will be able to defeat you. Never, never again, you must never give up.

Mas collapses in the arms of his friends. Jack and Gana carry Mas to the exit.

The cinema catches fire.

Scene 2

Cupid and Janani come out of the shop.

¹⁹ Thala is the nickname of actor Ajith Kumar.

Cupid. Love, Kaadal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour...

Janani. Where is Jack? We got married today and he has already gone to the cinema with his friends. Where is he?

Cupid. Love, Kaadal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour...

Janani. All you can say is love, love, love.

Cupid. Love, Kaadal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour...

Janani. I will go and get him.

She starts to leave.

Janani. Which way should I go? This way or that way?

Cupid. Love, Kaadal, Ishq, Mohabbat, Amour...

Janani. I'm leaving!

Janani heads for the exit and then turns back.

Cupid. Jack?

Janani looks for Jack.

Cupid. Majnu, Shahjahan, Romeo, Antonio²⁰...

Janani attacks Cupid.

She hits him, kicks him, then throws herself to the ground.

They get up together.

Cupid. Jack, I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains, bluebells, dark hazels and rustic baskets of kisses. I want to do with you what spring does with cherry trees.²¹ Jack, I love you.

²⁰ Legendary lovers' names.

²¹ Lines taken from Pablo Neruda's "Poem XIV: Every Day You Play" in *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair (Bilingual Edition)*, translated by W.S. Merwin, Penguin Classics, 1969, 2004, p. 55.

Janani. Fire! I see fire everywhere! It's the cinema. It's burning.

Scene 3

Mas' funeral procession crosses the stage.

Jack. My friend is dead, he was killed before my eyes, and I did not do anything because my heart thinks of Janani. Love made me lose my manhood, and made me a coward. My brother, I will avenge your death! My friend's body is alone in the procession. One of us should join him.

Jack has a sword. He enters the house.

He rushes out followed by Dheena who collapses on the ground.

Janani's mother comes out of the house and throws herself on Dheena's body.

She is joined by Aya.

Both of them wail in pain.

Janani's mother. Oh, Honourable members of our community! A Chandala has entered my house and killed my nephew before my eyes! I promise a handsome reward to whoever brings back this Chandala, alive or dead. If you kill one of us, we will kill a hundred of yours!

She goes into the house.

Aya alone on stage starts a funeral song.

Janani comes out of the shop.

Janani. What's wrong?

Aya. He's dead!

Janani. Jack is dead?

Aya. No, your cousin Dheena is dead.

Janani. How did he die?

Aya. Your husband Jack killed him. Your mother swore to kill Jack. If they find out the truth, they won't spare you. Listen, tomorrow morning you can get up as usual, put on your uniform and go to university, no one will notice anything. And in a week your cousin Ranjith will be here, marry him and go far away from here.

Janani. Do you really think the uniform will still fit me?

Aya. The little bird wants to fly, for that the little bird will pay. What will I tell your parents then?

Janani. Tell them that I am ready to take care of myself. I want to see Jack. Find him for me.

Janani gives her a letter.

Aya goes out.

Janani. I am going to the nuptial bed. May death or Jack come and take my virginity. Oh! If it is Death, my family will perform the ritual dedicated to women who die as virgins so that their souls can rest in peace. A dalit will come and deflower my virgin body. What if my father called Jack to deflower me once I was dead...?

Scene 4

Jack is alone on stage, with his sword.

The bodies of Mas and Dheena are still present on stage.

Jack. Jack, loving without caring about caste is only possible in movies. Mama warned me. And I replied to him with Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. Janani is waiting for me in the shop, but I won't go see her. Janani, I tricked you so I could marry you and become a member of the high caste. Everything will be fine, the members of your caste will find you, they will convince you to forget me and they will marry you to a boy of your caste. All's well that ends well! And I will go and join my friend Mas. I will stage my own death

now. Mas, I avenged your death. (*Pointing at Dheena's body*). I killed him. Dheena, get up. Show him your wound.

Dheena's body complies.

Jack. Janani!

Janani comes out of the shop.

Jack. Now she will speak as you wish.

Janani.²² Jack! What is your caste? Answer me Jack, what caste category do you belong to? Do you even know? It must be written in your school records. General? Other Castes? Backward Castes? Most Backward Castes? Scheduled Castes? Scheduled Tribes? Chandalas?!

Jack. Romeo!

Janani. Romeo? Do you know what the first sentence of the play *Romeo and Juliet* is? The first words of the play are: Two families, both equal in dignity!

Jack collapses.

The Prologue²³

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.

²² Here, in his vision, Jack is able to hear Janani's voice.

²³ *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (prologue).

The fearful passage of their death-marked love
And the continuance of their parents' rage —
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove —
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;

The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Scene 5

*Jack is seated on the chair of the funeral ritual. Cupid and friends
mourn him.*

Aya enters.

Aya. Jack, wake up. Get out of your nightmare.

Jack does not wake up.

Aya takes out Janani's letter.

Aya. Jack, I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains,
bluebells, dark hazels and rustic baskets of kisses. I want to do with
you what spring does with cherry trees. Jack, I love you.

Cupid shoots an arrow at Jack.

Jack wakes up and begins to sing.

Aya. Romeo, I wish you a beautiful night of love.

Jack leaves with his friends.

Aya. I know what will happen now. When I go home, her parents
will ask me: 'Where is Janani?' I will answer: 'Janani has gone to
pee. No, she has gone to shit. No, no, she has gone to the market
with the neighbours.' It will soon be night time, and they will ask
me: 'Where is Janani now? Janani! Janani!' They will go and see in
her room. They will beat me to know the truth from me. If they hit
me, I will end up telling the truth, right? Janani has left the house.
With Jack, the boy from the colony. I am the one who helped them!

To run away, to get married, I even helped them for this night of love that awaits them! Do you know what will happen if I confess everything? What? You want me to go and wait in the garden? Yes. I will have only one regret then: that no one visited my balcony ever.

Scene 6

Janani leaves the shop, Jack walks in front of her.

They both carry a puppet in their image.

Janani undresses Jack's puppet and Jack undresses Janani's, until both are naked.

They place the two naked puppets side by side, facing the audience.

Jack and Janani go to the shop together and lock themselves inside.

Scene 7

Mama enters half-costumed for the upcoming performance and arranges the elements dedicated to the ritual, on the stage.

Mama. The whole city is on fire, bloodshed all around. I thought that love would destroy the caste system. But love has destroyed our lives. Everything is happening like in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. But I will change the end of the story. Tomorrow I will embody the goddess Kali, and the whole city will be in front of me. During the ceremony, Jack and Janani will be able to escape. They will escape death. I, Mama, will protect them. I, Kali, will protect them.

Gana and a friend enter to finish preparing the ritual. Mama transforms and enters the skin of the goddess Kali, he sings.

Scene 8

Janani's parents enter.

Janani's mother goes to the shop, knocks on the door. She starts singing as she breaks down.

Janani finally opens it.

They hug each other.

Janani then goes to hug her father.

Janani's father. They killed your cousin Dheena. We won't let them hurt you. We know everything, your nanny confessed everything to us. Consider it all a nightmare and come home.

Janani. My marriage to Jack was like a dream. Dheena's hatred turned it into a nightmare.

Janani's father. Listen Janani, you are too young and too immature. They are trying to fool you, come back with us!

Janani refuses and goes to the shop.

Her mother throws herself at her feet to stop her, singing again.

Janani ignores her and locks herself in the shop.

Janani's father leaves the scene.

Janani's mother. Anyone want to sleep with my daughter? She is a pretty young woman. She is from Vaishnava Nagar. Hey Janani, what is your price? 100 rupees? 200 rupees? 500 rupees! But if you are a dalit or a friend of Jack, then it is free. This is the shop where she sells her body. Janani! Your customers are waiting for you, undress.

She opens the door of the shop.

Janani's mother. What you are wearing belongs to us, give me back your clothes!

Janani throws her clothes one by one.

Janani's mother. And your sandals too. Now that you are a Chandala, you don't need them anymore! Your husband got what he wanted from you: here you are naked in the street.

Scene 9

Mama concentrates for the upcoming performance.

Gana finishes preparing the ritual.

Janani's father enters.

Janani's father. Gana!

Gana. Tell me, sir.

Janani's father. The wet nurse died early this morning.

Gana. She died?

Janani's father. Yes. She fell in the garden...

Gana. I can't believe it.

Janani's father. Forget it. She died a virgin. So, Aya's body is in the room. Do the marriage ritual and deflower her.

Gana enters Janani's house.

Mama leaves.

Janani's father. My daughter is so selfish. To satisfy her body's desires, she sacrificed the family's honour. She dared marry a dalit, I have no dignity anymore. In nine months, she will carry a Chandala in her belly, bringing chaos, disorder and apocalypse... My soul is soiled! I am betrayed, I will not let it happen. I am my community!

Two killers enter. Janani's father shows them the shop, the killers enter the shop.

Janani's mother enters with offerings

Mama enters transformed into Kali and performs the ritual.

Gana comes out of the house. The killers leave the shop.

Janani's parents enter their house.

Mama goes to the shop and opens the door. He discovers the bodies of the two lovers.

Mama. (*Singing*)

I have already forgotten my songs,
I have abandoned my rhythms and my sounds...
I can't resist the urge to sing!
Oh goddess Kali!
I can't resist the urge to play.
Oh goddess Kali!
If we remain silent any longer,
it's over for us.
If we remain silent any longer,
it's over for us...
Let's sing so we don't die!
Oh goddess Kali!
Or let's sing until we die!
Oh goddess Kali!²⁴

The Voice of Kausalya. After Shankar's death, I tried to commit suicide twice..., I was not able to live without him and without his immense tenderness. One night, in my dream, he told me: 'Stop thinking that I am dead, do not listen to what others say, I am not dead, I am always with you...' I have always been courageous, I took my parents to court. After a year and a half of trials where I suffered all the humiliations possible and imaginable, the murderers and my father were severely sentenced in December 2017, but my mother was released... She is not a mother, she is a murderer who is an accomplice in this heinous crime of honour. I took my mother to court, the trial is ongoing... Some people ask me how can you have your own parents convicted? How can they send killers against their own daughter? My mother couldn't stop talking about honour, caste, family, but she never wanted to listen to my heart...²⁵

²⁴ A folk song from Kerala.

²⁵ In June 2020, Madras High Court acquitted Kausalya's father Chinnasamy and released him. The case has now moved up to Supreme Court.