

## The Mobile Girls Koottam

### Disclaimer: THIS IS NOT A SCRIPT

This is the narrative of the play and the directorial notes. The dialogues and the scene actions will be discovered as a group during the rehearsal process. It is good to use the podcast material and the book as study material along with this. Once the actors have worked through one reading, we will sit with the actual Mobile Girls for a slumber process and understand how best to tell their story.

**Stage Design:** We get to play with mats, pillows, some boxes, some moveable lights and mobile phones. There is an actual TV with pre-recorded material playing. There is a wheelable staircase that divides the stage and also creates levels to play with.

**Costumes:** nighties, salwars, some masks

1.

Satya (22) stands at the mobile phone assembly line, her feet swelling and enthusiasm dipping. Every time she steps out of line the machine does a small *beep*. She heckles at the machine like it's a living being and decides to do one large step away. As she jumps, the whole stage turns red and the machine goes *beeeeeep*.

Mookan, the supervisor, (*masked*) descends on to stage bearing down on Satya, with insults on how she is not being productive enough for her own good, so much *motivational* life advice that it would ache the ears of all listening. Satya begs that she is not feeling well and just needs a small break, but Mookan almost physically pushes her back into line... when in dramatic slow motion Satya begins to faint! The sounds and the lights begin to spiral.

**Zoro**, the masked lover, enters swinging on to stage, ready for action!

In one swift motion, he punches Mookan off-stage and catches Satya before she collapses on to the floor. For a moment, both of them stay in embrace peering into each other's eyes as the machines behind them transform into background dancers.

2.

A beautiful dreamy love song unfolds picking up our spirits of hope for a life that we work for and build together... a future that is brighter than today only if we're willing to endure the hardships of today. The song merges into a phone ringtone - a Ganapati mantram.

3.

The stage dissolves from a dance routine to a set of mats strewn on the floor - two women, Abhinaya and Satya fast asleep, sprawled across the mats. A phone blares the Ganapati ringtone amidst them. Abhinaya takes a pillow and buries herself back to sleep. Satya wakes up and yells, "Muthu" angry to be called out of her dream.

4.

Muthu enters, picks up the phone and switches on the TV precariously placed on a shelf - where an astrologer speaks about how lucky the day ahead is going to be...

Muthu walks to the stairs, wheeled on to the side of the stage, and attends the call. She speaks to her mother about paying off the gold bangle. In six months time, she would have saved enough for three sovereigns, which should help them get a decent match for her.

5.

She walks back in and changes the channel to some songs, reducing the volume.

Muthu kicks awake Abhinaya, who mumbles about having only one day once in a while where she doesn't have to worry about sleeping in. There are papers strewn under her pillow. Satya picks it up and makes fun of her for spending all night writing bit notes for her exam. Abhinaya shoos her off and asks her to make coffee, black.

At the other side of the stage is the kitchen, where Muthu begins making the coffee still incessantly yapping away over and above the TV about only getting one day with all of them in the house and that they would rather spend that time sleeping away. She starts off on advice of how this is not going to work when they have to run their own families and no man will accept a woman who does this. Satya's phone rings and Abhinaya comments that none of it matters when one is in **love!**

6.

Satya takes the call and whispers as the girls make fun of her... moving to the stairs, she settles down to talk. Zoro appears on the other side of the stairs engrossed in his phone. Both of them plan to break the news to their parents. They're from different communities. Zoro wants to elope by the end of the month for her birthday. Satya doesn't want to elope before her police exams. They also need the money from the factory jobs and the promised raises to run their family and fund what might be a very violent escape from their families. They decide to pick a date by the end of today. Muthu keeps calling out to her from inside and then storms out with the coffee and gives it to her. She starts teasing her. Satya cuts the call and suggests it isn't time for making chicken biryani. Muthu asks her to first brush her teeth and have a bath.

7.

Satya shuttles in and pulls up Abhinaya with the demand for chicken biryani. How many days it has been since all of them could be together? And if she gets selected for the police force or if all goes well, she doesn't even if she will have many days with all of them. Abhinaya has been promising to make chicken biryani for so long. It has to be today!!! Muthu joins in and wants more eggs this time. Abhinaya pushes off Muthu and asks her to go get the meat. They pool in some money and Muthu gets ready to leave.

8.

Kalpana and Suganthi (fix names, merge characters) meet them at the door. Muthu is surprised. It's one of those strange days a lot of them have a day off. Kalpana drags her in, demanding they be part of the biryani plan. She shoves more money in Muthu's hand and asks why not make beef one of these days. Muthu takes the money and walks off remarking, *my people don't eat that... let's have something we will all like.*

9.

While Muthu is out, the girls get ready and clean the hall, and relax out watching a serial on the TV where the mother-in-law is angry that her son's wife wants to get a job. Suganthi talks off how if she had not gotten this job against all their wishes today her son and her would have to stand in the middle of the road. The kitchen is cleaned as the girls chat about their right to work and have the dignity of their own money and savings.

10.

When Muthu returns, the Abhinaya brings out 1 kg of onions,  $\frac{1}{2}$  kg of tomatoes, garlic and chillies. She says everyone has to help her make the biryani together. As they begin helping her peel the onions and garlic, Satya gets a call and walks away. It must be Zoro, who else! Muthu gets distracted by the TV, changing the channels for the perfect work music. Abhinaya comments it will be much easier if they each do one job like peeling and cutting, for which Muthu says can't we get one day break from the assembly line. Abhinaya says she'll do this by herself as their help might make the biryani into a pongal. Kalpana gets a call from the union, as Satya returns. Kalpana is very animated on the call. As she speaks, she shares the news with others - apparently the owners of the factory are coming down from abroad.

11.

They bring out playing cards and start a game. Abhinaya preps the chicken and puts the curry on the stove. This scene is designed based on the game rummy. While discussing what they may each say to the owners of the factory, they figure out the cards/pieces of life they need to put together to make their dreams come true - what forms the set? The cooker whistles.

12

Satya gets a call from Zoro that there's a rumour that the factory is shutting down. She shoves it off as a silly rumour. Why will the owners come down to shut down their factory? The preparation for the biryani rice starts as the girls despair that their holiday together is being bombarded with stupid rumours.

13

Muthu brings out more coffee as the last bits for putting the biryani together happens. They start talking about what they just might do if the news was true, but no one believes there is any connection between changes at the headquarters and some town in Vietnam. Satya wonders if she will go through similar things while working for the police force or if there are any workplaces that truly understand women. We learn the story of how the union was formed and that they feel they are in the most secure position possible in any factory in India now. The biryani Dum is put on the stove.

14

**Muthu starts switching the channels and finally lands on the BREAKING NEWS**

**The factory is being shut down and shifted to Hanoi, Vietnam.**

**High chaos. Phones ring. Parents panic. Zoro panics. Fights. Wondering what will happen to each of them. A huge spiral down in each of their lives.**

**The biryani dum burns!**

**Abhinaya has a breakdown.**

**The girls save the biryani.**

**15**

**The girls sit on the terrace around the big vessel of burnt biryani, the stars shining over them, wondering what is to happen to their lives from here on, swearing to always cherish the luck of having shared this phase of their lives together. A song refrain begins.**

**16**

**The TV is rolled to centre stage. We play videos of our Mobile Girls talking about how their lives have been since this happened.**