

**Emergence of New Woman in Popular Hindi Cinema:  
A Postmodernist Study of Select Films**

**A  
Thesis  
Submitted to**



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PHAGWARA – 144411 (PUNJAB)  
2019**

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## **Introduction**

The history of films in India dates back to 1896, with first feature film made in 1912-13. Commercial cinema has been attributed to be the single most powerful mode of communication in Indian society. Several studies have reflected that as many as approximately twelve million Indians go to cinema halls to watch films every week. Since the Indian commercial cinema has had the presence of too many dance and song sequences, romance and colour; it has generally been dismissed to be too shallow, escapist, melodramatic or simply spectacular. If prodded deeper down, apart from being shallow and escapist, Indian cinema has efficiently dealt with the trending issues of the time across over a century.

Women's issues have been debated about in the Hindi commercial cinema almost right from the beginning. Yet, the feminist film critique in the early phase was more concerned with the absence of female perspective from popular mainstream Hindi cinema. The focus of such criticism was the inferior and regressive position of women in films; in terms of women working and creating substantial output in the form of films as well as the stereotypical representation of women in films. Women as objects to be gazed and utilised for sensationalism have concerned the female spectatorship and critics alike. Gradually, the advent of globalisation in the Indian market economy and subsequent corporatisation of the film industry have paved the way for the role specifically chalked out keeping in mind the relevance and importance of female subjects. The Hindi films have witnessed a dynamic transformation in the way women are projected and treated in films. Stating that does not infer that women have attained their rightful position in the film industry, or there is no more sexual objectification of women in films. Yet, change in women's status in the postmodern globalised society has reflected in the more powerful roles being authored for them exclusively keeping their position in mind, assisting to the cause of the New Woman.

The title of the present thesis is 'Emergence of New Woman in Popular Hindi Cinema: A Postmodernist Study of Select Films.' The proposed research focuses on the portrayal of empowered women in the backdrop of changing societal structure emerging out of the postmodern tendencies. The primary concern is about the study of



female characters, usually the protagonists of the films from the perspectives of the postmodernistic postulates of the time. Also, the focus is on how these tendencies have helped in understanding the minds and actions of these women and channelized their inner strength to emerge as the stronger and empowered New Women. Throughout the postmodern era, the new notions of female subjectivity are reflected in several ways, including due representation in social and political circles, resulting in the creation of new spaces and opportunities for women. Several studies have been conducted which claim better prospects for women while challenging the pre-existing patriarchal setup through the numerous role models available in the postmodern era (Ahmed 51). The assumption of this thesis is that gender relations and the women's subjectivity have undergone a major shift in postmodern times, Hindi cinema being a mode of reflecting that shift.

Several theoretical studies have approached characterisation, actions, and reactions of women in films and their relationship to philosophical debates on postmodernism. For this particular research project, three iconic postmodernist critics have been shortlisted, whose tenets and postulates on postmodernism have been treated as a central point of reference for the ensuing research; including Fredric Jameson's seminal work *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and the notion of *Power* in his discourse analysis, as well as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. The context of these works applied for the analysis suggests that visual features or filmic strategies exhibited by contemporary sample films were illustrative of broader theoretical propositions: Pastiche, New Depthlessness, and Schizophrenia in Jameson; the use of Power to 'objectivise subjects' in Foucault and the 'Performance' of gender in Butler. Jameson and Foucault were concerned to insist that these features were indicative of wider cultural and historical processes. But the ease with which theorists drew equally upon fiction films, architecture, and philosophy to construct a notion of 'postmodernist culture'; obscured the terms upon which films concerning women in the lead across the geographical boundaries, might be construed in view of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Judith Butler's idea of performativity has a central concept of the theory that an individual's gender is constructed through his/her repetitive performance of gender. It can be defined as a

stylised repetition of acts, simulation and replication of the dominant stereotypes about gender. Elaine Showalter's idea of gynocriticism finds validity in the research as it forms the basic idea of the need for interpretation of films from feministic perspective.

The research has taken up the film samples from the last twenty-five years, the point of the advent of globalisation and the realisation of the impact of postmodernism in the Indian context. The first film selected for the purpose is *Rudaali* released in 1993 followed by *Maachis* (1996), *Chandni Bar* (2001), *Fashion* (2008), *Queen* (2013), and *Mom* (2017). The distinguishing feature of all these films is that all the select films have received National Award for the Best Actress. Featuring brilliant and critically acclaimed actresses like Tabu, Priyanka Chopra, Kangana Ranaut, and Sridevi; these films are some of the most instrumental films putting forward the issues of women and their incessant fighting spirit forming the image of the modern-day empowered woman. All these films share a common undercurrent of struggle and spirited fight women protagonists put forward in the face of adversities; regardless of the fact whether they succeed or fail while doing so. The motif of all these films is addressing the issues and concerns being faced by the women in the postmodern world.

The first chapter entitled 'Brief Candle' is split into different parts. The first part details about the history and development of Hindi film industry, gradually shifting the focus towards a discussion on the position of women in the industry followed by the next section defining film theory and its assimilation with feminism. It introduces the progression of film theory and the various types of film theories, focusing specifically on feminist film theory. Next part focuses on a discussion on the phenomenon of the New Woman. Another part deals with concepts of modernism/postmodernism and the postmodern feminist film, followed by an analysis of the Feministic foundation of the research, i.e., Elaine Showalter's idea of gynocriticism and its application to the present research.

The second chapter entitled 'Power, Pleasure, and Persecution: The Story of Class and Gender Struggle in *Rudaali*' focuses on the analysis and application of Foucault's ideas of Power and Sexuality to the film. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the movie and the background of the creative output of the renowned

director of the film Kalpana Lajmi, followed by the analysis of the theme of survival of the film. It highlights how the casteist and patriarchal powers dominate over the village where different forces are present to browbeat downtrodden communities in numerous ways. Women are the dual victims of such subjugation. It further goes on to discuss the notion of the power structure in Foucault's theory along with discussing sexual politics involved in the suppression and exploitation of the weaker strata of the society, particularly women.

The third chapter entitled 'The Context of Performativity in *Maachis*' analyses the importance of the debate over the idea of how gender plays an instrumental role in creating the identity of the women. Judith Butler's idea of performativity forms the central theory of the chapter, whereby she states that it is not 'natural' and 'normal' to be a female, and also that it emerges as natural only because the gender is repeatedly 'performed'; subsequently, traditional identities of sex and/or gender are formed through these performances. Hierarchy plays a crucial role in establishing gender roles. Gender roles are shaped by social constructionists to be hierarchical and the hierarchy is predominantly male-advantageous. The chapter debates how the protagonist of the film *Maachis* subverts these gender roles to assert her position in society.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the storyline of the film, followed by a discussion on Butler's significant works, primarily the *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and her notion of Performativity. Next section deals with detailed analysis of the socio-political issues forming the basis of the film, including Operation Blue Star, Anti Sikh Riots of 1984 and their impact on the psyche of the victims. A detailed discussion on the application and the relevance of the theory to the film is analysed next.

The fourth chapter entitled 'The World of Women and *Chandni Bar*: A Jamesonian Perspective' discusses the strife and struggles its protagonist Mumtaz undergoes in order to emerge as a New Woman in the postmodern times. The film is an apt critique of the trials and tribulation the women in countries like India undergo in the wake of postmodern sensibilities and social structures. Such women are doubly subjugated as they are neither fully equipped to embrace the changing dynamics of the society, nor do they have any social or economic shield or support to encounter

the problems they come across. Through the film, Fredric Jameson's concepts of Pastiche, New Depthlessness, and Schizophrenia have been applied to explore the minds and struggles the women in postmodern society undergo. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the storyline of the film followed by the detailed analysis of Fredric Jameson's theories drawn significantly from his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984). A detailed analysis of the film is done by applying the above-mentioned theories.

The fifth chapter 'Foucauldian Feminism and Jamesonian Schizophrenia: Contesting Bodies, Sexuality, and Identity in *Fashion*' begins with a brief introduction to the narrative of the film *Fashion*. The film is an authentic testament of the commercialised postmodern society where consumer culture reign supreme and individual preferences and sensibilities are underplayed and overlooked. The chapter applies the dual theories of Jameson's notion of postmodern New Depthless culture and Foucault's idea of Sexuality and Body to bring out the position of women in the commercialised and patriarchal culture through the persona of protagonists Meghna and Shonali. These women do not emerge as a New Women in traditional sense of the idea, yet their struggle and ultimate sense of self-worth ignite in them a unique realisation of their world and its emotional complexities.

The sixth chapter entitled '*Queen*: Transgressing the Limits of Performativity' seeks to illustrate how the main character of *Queen*, Rani negotiates herself through Indian traditions and capitalist postmodernity to emerge as New Woman of the contemporary times. The chapter begins with an overview of the storyline of the film, followed by the discussion on how women in Hindi cinema have undergone a major transformation across the decades, focusing on gender roles. The next section highlights the tenets of the theory of performativity, which has already been discussed in detail in chapter three. The theory is applied to interpret the gender restricted boundaries Rani transgresses in order to emerge as a New Woman.

The seventh chapter 'Resistance to the Power and the Notion of Depthlessness in *Mom*' attempts to analyse the emergence of New Woman in the film by analysing the protagonist's metamorphosis from a regular school teacher teaching at a Delhi school to a vengeful mother who avenges her stepdaughter's sexual assault at the hands of perpetrators who believed they could escape the retribution without being

caught and convicted. For the purpose, Fredric Jameson's notion of New Depthlessness and Michel Foucault's idea of power have been applied as a critical concept. The chapter discusses in detail how legal and social mechanics doubly traumatise the victims of sexual assault.

The main aim of the present study is to discuss the emergence of the New Woman in Hindi films under the scrutiny of specific postmodern postulates. The main objectives are:

1. To explore the emergence of 'New Woman' in Hindi films from the postulates of Postmodernism (1990-2018) while focusing on the theories of Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler.
2. To investigate the impact of socio-cultural forces on Hindi films.
3. To find out the trends in the portrayal of women characters in postmodern Indian cinema.
4. To apply the feministic theory of Elaine Showalter in select Hindi movies.

The present research implements comparative and analytical approaches to trace out the emergence of the postmodern New Women in the select films. The formatting of this research strictly abides by MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition. This thesis has enriched due to immense resources like libraries of Punjabi University, Patiala; Panjab University, Chandigarh; Regional Campus Panjab University; Ludhiana, and several online websites as well as databases including Springer Link, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Cambridge Core, and Sage etc.

The scope of the present research is to assist the readers to have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how normative gender issues impact the ideology and perceptions of the masses, specifically affecting the image of womanhood. How women have been tied to conventional images and how they have been suffering from the burden of the expectations for a long time. It makes the readers understand how the changes in the socio-economic conditions of the country in postmodern times have given the women an opportunity to transgress the boundaries of the restrictive ideology; changes being reflected through the medium of cinema. Cinema being the biggest mode of communication and entertainment in the country affects and transforms the perceptions of the masses. It helps the readers to

realise how well this mode can be manipulated to work in the direction of betterment of women.

## Chapter 1

### Brief Candle

The Indian film industry has traversed long path in the preceding century. All in all, it has been a journey of over 100 years, with early black and white shaky screens converting into a multi-pronged and vast economic empire. Today, the Indian film industry takes pride in being the largest film industry of the world in terms of the number of films released annually. After having dually recognised itself as an industry, Indian popular cinema has registered colossal advancement in all areas, including infrastructure, marketing, financing, and distribution. Owing to the vast Indian diaspora, the Indian film industry has made remarkable inroads the international market. In terms of services, capital, and technology, the industry has made extraordinary progress.

Released in 1913, *Raja Harishchandra*, produced by Dadasaheb Phalke, is termed to be the first Indian film. In the beginning, movies were made without sound, and with the advent of technology, movies with sound were produced. Assimilation of sound proved to be the most defining moments for the development of the Indian film industry, as it was then that the variety of new elements were added to the film production. It was in 1931 with the release of *Alam Ara* that sound was first introduced in Indian films. The film was a huge commercial success. During the following years, approximately 200 films were being produced in black and white. *Kisan Kanya*, released in 1937, is attributed to be the first coloured film. The film was not a commercial hit as were the films released with the advent of sound. Due to the historical events like WWII, the Independence movement, and the partition of the country, Hindi films suffered immensely. It was only around the 1950s that the coloured film started being successful at the box office. The years from the 1950s to 70s are considered the golden era of the film when films did not have static dialogues anymore, but with the infusion of the great romantic songs, choreography, cinematography, and storyline became all-time classic testaments for the Hindi film industry to come.

Hindi emerged as the primary language of the film production with a wide variety of other vernacular languages. Ever since, the Hindi film industry has developed into the dominant film industry of the country, and also with a distinct genre of its own. The Hindi-language films contribute to the bulk of the market because Hindi is a widely understood language in northern India and few neighbouring countries. Hindi cinema, in its post-2000 manifestation, has seen a change in various aspects. Anupama Chopra declared that “the Bollywood rules are being bent beyond all recognition” (54), indicating towards the ever-evolving dynamics of Hindi cinema.

Hindi films, since its inception, have been a medium of mass consumption by the audience in India and across the globe. Evolving from humble movies like *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Alam Ara* (1931), and *Acchut Kanya* (1936), Hindi film industry has turned into a multi-billion industry; providing occupation, entertainment, and unparalleled popularity to the film stars. Thousands of movies are produced every year, catering to the demand of the audience. Hindi cinema not only has a presence and demand in India, but it also has a market in other countries. Owing to immense changes because of globalization, Indian films have gained popularity across the globe (Tyrrell 137). Subsequently, other countries, particularly European countries acknowledged the advantages of Hindi films being shot at their locations. Over the years, Switzerland, the US, Malaysia, and numerous other countries have become ideal destinations for Hindi films’ shooting. Other countries, as well, have realised the benefits of getting Hindi films shot at their locations. Thus, the revenue earned from shooting as well as tourism is endless.

Hindi film industry is also commonly labelled as the ‘Bollywood’. The name ‘Bollywood’ was coined in 1976 by a crime fiction writer H. R. F. Keating. It was a controversial term that even the Hindi film actors found hard to accept. Hindi film producers also resented the comparison of Bollywood to Hollywood (Chopra155). Bollywood as an industry is also alleged to be unduly inspired by its successful counterpart, Hollywood, by imitating its products. The title ‘Bollywood’, finding its genesis in the amalgamation of the terms Bombay and Hollywood suggests that the Indian cinema is imitating Hollywood. The title ‘Bollywood’ is also offensive as it made Hindi cinema look like a derivation from Hollywood (Dwyer 65) and people



usually regard original products as superior to their imitations. Also, Bollywood is often labelled to be as a subordinate to Hollywood, primarily because it is located in a developing country, India. “Despite the displeasure of those in the film industry; however, the name was used by the media and later used widely. It was even included in the fifth edition of the Oxford English Dictionary” (Chopra 67).

Comparing Hindi movies with Hollywood movies, Ashish Nandy claims that Hindi cinema had no genre-specific films until recently. It was all a disorderly mass of having multi-layering of romance, tragedy comedy, dancing, singing, and action; all compiled in one film. The reason could be that a Hindi movie has to cater to a variety of audience, coming from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. He asserts. “An average, ‘normal’ Bombay film has to be, to the extent possible, everything to everyone. It has to cut across the myriad ethnicities and lifestyles of India and even of the world that impinges on India. The popular film is lowbrow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naiveté, and vulgarity” (97). Manjunath Pendakur states in this regard:

Government reports estimate that India’s more than 13,000 cinemas seat a daily crush of nearly 15 million people. Between 750 to 800 feature films are released each year and are enjoyed by audiences throughout Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Many films are simultaneously released in several of India’s 18 official languages, but the vast majority is produced in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam. (230)

Assimilation of feminism with film theory gives way to some interesting perspectives. Film theory can be defined as the analysis of cinema through which a comprehensive understanding of film's relationship to reality can be deciphered. Not only the reality, but also cinema’s relationship with the other forms of arts, individual viewers, and society at large are attempted to be interpreted. Films acknowledged as being the newest art form of the preceding century, have right away and incessantly invited theoretical attempts to define its character and role. Primarily as a result of film's own inadequacy as the youngest of the arts, the assertion of much of the early film theory was to expand on the degree of respectability. Early film theory arose in the silent era

and was mostly concerned with defining the crucial elements of the medium. While discussing film theory, J. Dudley Andrew in his *Concepts in Film Theory* opines:

Modern theory approaches nothing directly, neither the audience through questionnaire and neurophysiological experiments nor the films through minute formal analyses and experiments. Such audience studies and formal experiments which do go in mainstream film theory are invariably guided by the current general discourse, that is, by reflective concepts. (3)

Disciplines like Psychoanalysis, Gender Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Literary Theory, Academe, and Linguistics heavily influenced the film theory during the 1960s and 70s. From the 1990s onwards, the revolution in digital technology has impacted the film theory severely. Film theorists like Mary Ann Doane, Philip Rosen, and Laura Mulvey have succeeded in renewing the interest in the notion that how a film has the ability to capture the image in a moment.

Focusing on the various types of film theories; regarding the portrayal of women in films, Claire Johnston, whose work demonstrated the usefulness of Psychoanalysis, Semiotics, Auteur Theory, Marxism, and Structural Anthropology to films has asserted that there is a range of hidden meanings in films. How films insert meaning through the use of codes and conventions not dissimilar to the way languages are used to construct meaning in communication is the primary assumption of the Structuralist film theory. Another prominent Structuralist film critic Peter Gidal defines Structuralist film technique as:

Structural/ Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process. But by 'deals with' I do not mean 'represents'. In other words, such films do not document various film procedures, which would place them in the same category as films which transparently document a narrative, a set of actions, etc. (23)

Structuralist film technique can best be understood by interpreting how seemingly dissimilar scenes put together can create an additional idea: A thunderstorm approaching the city, a moving bus, a lost expression on a man's face and again a

scene of a thunderstorm approaching the city is depicted. While nothing expresses fear through dialogues here, yet the meaning is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the scenes. Interpreting the hidden meaning can prove to be quite difficult at times. Features like lighting, position of camera, expressions, duration of the shot, combination, cultural meaning, and various other elements can actively highlight or subvert the scene's meaning.

Another major film premise and among the oldest theories is Marxist film theory; through which Sergei Eisenstein and other Russian filmmaker expressed the ideas of Marxism in 1920s. For these filmmakers, the Hegelian dialect was the best type of dialect. The point where the Russian filmmakers digressed from the Hollywood structure was their narrative style. Eisenstein proposed to reject such style of narration and eliminate the speaker and favoured the stories where the action is moved by a group.

Formalist film theory focuses on the technical aspects of film making, like light, setup, colour, and the composition of a shot etc. The theory believes that a film is an art and it should not be burdened with the responsibility of re-creating the reality. In a formalist film, images seen on the screen are shaped and moulded the way as a sculpture shapes and moulds the clay. Formalist film theorists, contrary to the realist theorists, consider that the cinematic art is achievable because it is not like reality. They use manipulation to create story and emotion. For example, variety in editing can create a variety of effects. All of these elements, combined together, create tension. Sergei Eisenstein comments about the skill of editing of shots: “[t]he juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that general quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a whole” (11).

Auteur theory originated in the 1950s and focuses on tracing how the director inserts his vision into the film. The presence of the director's persona is spread all across the film. Auteur is a French term meaning author, symbolising director is the author of the film. Director as the author of the film is the creator of the film and legally the copyright holder. As per certain Western countries' law, the film director is assigned to be the author of the film or one of the authors of the film.

Another prominent theory of film making, Apparatus theory derived several of its components from Marxist film theory, Psychoanalysis, and Semiotics during the decade of the 1970s. The fundamental belief of the Apparatus theory is that since mechanics of representation are ideological, cinema is by default ideological. The mechanics of cinema include camera and editing. The major premises of Apparatus theory can be visualised as three circles. The outer circle being the technique, middle circle as the style and the inner circle forms the interior meaning. The corresponding roles of the director may be that of a technician, a stylist, and an author. Apparatus theory also believes that ideology is not imposed upon the film, rather forms a part of it.

When the concepts of psychoanalysis are applied to a film, it is termed to be Psychoanalytical film theory. During the 1970s and 80s, the psychoanalytical concepts developed by French psychoanalyst and writer Jacques Lacan were applied while interpreting a film. As per this theory, the film viewer is seen as a subject of 'gaze'; largely constructed by the film itself and not by any outside power. Visuals on the screen become the object of desire of the subject. The viewing subjects tend to harbour a particular identification, usually with the leading male character. The basic idea of the theory is that viewers have a desire for completeness which the film succeeds in offering through identification with some object. While focusing on the Freudian theory of dream interpretation, Todd McGowan says that dreams present us with scenarios that show our desire encountering a necessary rather than a contingent obstacle. He opines that:

In contrast to dreams, films are conscious constructions and thus not the product of dreamwork, which would seem to limit the homology between dreams and films. If the dream work represents the key to dreams, its absence in the cinema would be significant. But there is a version of the dream work operative in the cinema, and it is the demands of film form. Just as psychoanalysis pays attention to the dream work in order to understand unconscious desire, psychoanalytical film theory focuses on film form in pursuit of the same end. The difference is that psychoanalysis concentrates on the desire of individual subject while psychoanalytical film theory

concerns itself with desire in larger sense-either desire in particular social situation or desire as such. (8-9)

Focusing on the key theory relevant in context to this research, Feminist film theory originated during the 1970s, primarily focusing at interpreting how cinema created perceptions and myths about women and femininity. The primary focus of the theory is to build a theoretical foundation, so as to debate about the representation of women in films as well as the female viewership. Talking about the history and genesis of feminist film studies, Janice R. Welsch states:

Feminist film theory has grown out of two diverse phenomena of the past couple of decades: the Women's Movement and intensification of interest in theory among film scholars. The convergence of the two has not always occurred, as one might expect, in the direct adaptation of the feminist film theory to film analyses and research. Instead, the women's movement and the feminist theory that has come out of that Movement, have prompted many film scholars to become feminists and to adopt feminist perspectives which in turn have influenced the questions they have posed in their film research. (66)

Classical cinema has usually been alleged to be very stereotypical in its representation of women. At the same time, it is also credited with discussing the scope of creation of women's cinema that would give preference to the female experience and female yearning. It was through feminist film studies that emergence of the feminist wave in cinematic critique became prominent through the organisation of women's film festivals. Commenting upon the dynamics between Film theory and Feminist film theory, prominent film critic Deborah Knight argues:

What feminist theory and Feminist film theory have long recognized is their asymmetrical relationship to the sorts of theory and Film theory that do not adopt the modifier 'feminist'. The use of modifier 'feminist' signals the self-consciously political commitment to theory as practice. The problem, if it is a problem, is that there is theory, and then there is a work that is conducted by feminist critics and theorists. Conceived in terms of asymmetry, theory (without the modifier) might be taken to be the privileged, central term, and the feminist theory

disadvantaged, decentred term-the term which depends, for its definition, on the form. (39)

Feminist film studies specifically focus on interpreting the response of female viewers and the contribution of female, producers, directors, actresses, and other associated professions.

Under the influence of postmodernist approach, Feminist film theory shifted its focus from simply inferring the meaning in a film to a deeper analysis of how the meaning is constructed in the film. The central argument of the theory is that gender or sexual difference is supreme in creating this meaning. Feminist film theory fundamentally believes that cinema is just not the representative of societal relations: rather it actively forms the notions around sexual difference and sexuality. A shift in the focus of feminist film studies was witnessed during the 1990s when it ceased interpreting gender in binary form and opened up to a variety of perspectives and interpretations. This breaking away resulted in a more diverse debate about ethnicity, masculinity, and queer sexualities.

With the focus on the projection of women in cinema and male gaze, feminist film theory succeeded in incorporating varied opinions and leaving a significant impact on other forms of cultural media during the 1970s and 80s. Early Hollywood films invariably projected women in the sexist images. They were portrayed in acutely conventional and extreme images; either that of a mother or a prostitute. Such routinely recycled images were nothing more than the distortion of the normal, white and black persona of the women as individuals. Feminist critics suggested a more realistic image of women in cinema. With the onset of postmodernism, it was subsequently realised that only the change in the projection of female characters will not resolve the underlying issues of the female spectatorship. With a record of sexualised objectification of women in Hollywood cinema, a need was felt to comprehend its malicious structure towards female projection. What was most problematic was the fact that women were passed off as a sign which was natural or realistic; on the contrary, they imbibe certain codes and conventions in the form of its ideological meaning. In the patriarchal set-up, women are deprived of any inherent meaning of themselves; rather they are interpreted in relation to men. Being a woman naturally indicated not being a man.

Male gaze and body politics form a major part of the debate over-representation of women, particularly postmodern women in Hindi cinema. Laura Mulvey in her landmark article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) borrows the notion of scopophilia, referring to pleasure one draws by looking at the object of desire so as to explain the notion of appeal in Hollywood cinema. Mulvey stated that films kindle visual pleasure by incorporating the elements of voyeurism and narcissism in the narrative of the film. She emphasises that both the phenomena are gendered in nature. The male actors of the classical films directed their gaze towards the females. The viewers, while watching the film are accustomed to perceiving the images from the male point of view. As per Mulvey, cinematic gaze is formed by three components, including camera, character, and viewer. These components turn female characters into a mere spectacle. Narcissism reinforces identification, where the viewers tend to identify with the near-perfect image of the male lead. The components of gaze and narcissistic identification depend upon the trivialised projection of the female characters and also the authoritative power of the male characters.

There was a shift in this phenomenon during the 1970s and 80s when female characters also could make the male characters their object of desire, though holding no significant worth. Such films involved a mere reversal of roles in which the underlying structures of dominance and submission are still intact (Kaplan 83). Feminist critics came up with some alternatives to replace the identification with the male gaze. In one of such alternatives, the female spectator could adapt to the narcissism entwined in becoming one's own desired object. Mary Ann Doane, while elaborating on this alternative states "Both the female character and the female spectator had to turn their active desire into a passive desire to be the desired object" (34). It is around the notions of subjectivity and desire, that the question of female spectatorship circles. The idea of subjectivity can be defined as a process of regular self-revival rather than being a fixated unit. Popular culture, including cinema, has been notorious for creating fixed positions for female subjectivity by ascribing certain codes and beliefs. de Lauretis states that in Hollywood film 'woman' serves as a sign acting within an Oedipal narrative not being the subject of desire; instead, she could only be represented as representation (124). It will be pertinent to note that in 1980s

feminist film theory figure out its foundation of negligible representability of women as a subject of desire. Female characters were made to identify with the conventional images of beauty on the screen like femme fatale.

Kaja Silverman states that feminist film theory was hugely influenced by the debate on both Lacanian as well as Freudian psychoanalysis (56). There has been a conflict of opinion between the Feminists and the Psychoanalysts regarding the implementation of Freudian theory to the feministic analysis, as Freudian psychology exclusively focused on the sexual differences. Feminist critics have been of the opinion that the dichotomy of male/female binary needs to be redefined. Indicating towards another limitation of the Freudian psychoanalysis, the feminists critics point out towards an almost absent focus on the other differences, such as sexual, class, race, and age preference.

Feminist critics objected to the Psychoanalytical criticism's lack of acknowledgement of diversity and exclusive focus on sexual difference. Critics like Jane Gaines emphasised on the need of assimilation of black feminism in order to understand how gender interests with the issues of class, race and ethnicity (23). Prominent feminist critic bell hooks argues that the response of black spectators to Hollywood films has always been critically assessed by the black critics (56). Richard Dyer is of the opinion that Hollywood cinema has always projected male, white subjectivity as a norm. During the 1960s feminist revolution, feminist critics called for a counter cinema that produced radical, experimental, and unorthodox films, with a variety of experiences (221). This digression from classical visual and narrative codes could result in the creation of cinema that could undertake the issues pertaining to female spectatorship, desire, and gaze. Several filmmakers arrived in the filmmaking scenario with novel perspectives, receiving a lot of attention from feminist critics (Kuhn 98). Gradually, the efforts of the female filmmakers started paying off, as the films made by these female filmmakers started being appreciated within the larger framework of popular cinema (Smelik 45).

Hindi films' significant presence at the global level is aided by the women who have played instrumental role in taking forward the status of films on the global platform. In the early years of film production, mainly during the 1920s, most of the women-centred films revolved around the Sati concept, a woman who 'willingly'



enters the funeral pyre of her husband. A Sati had no identity of her own: the only purpose of her existence being the service of her master lord. Ironically, co-existing with the Sati stereotype, an image of a single woman with immense physical and character strength emerged from the 1930s till 1950s. Iconic 'Fearless Nadia', the stunt queen led from the front. Her actions denoted her ideals and she did not believe in the silent agony of the virtuous women. Her *Hunterwali* (1934) was followed by a stream of similar kind of films. Nadia ruled the screens for another decade till Hema Malini appeared on the horizon with her *Seeta and Geeta* (1972) to take on the villains single-handedly. Hema plays a double role in the film. The notion of double role can be found to be having its roots in ancient Indian history, according to which a woman can be a personification of either of the two character ideals. An image of a pious, gentle, and submissive soul who sacrificed her life for the sake of the family, contrasted with the Durga image; retaliating and devastating, exhibiting her ruthless side. Though the women-centric films in the 1930s and 40s have been few and far between, the list does comprise of the brave efforts of film production houses which have treated the issues of women sympathetically.

With the onset of the change in socio-economic dynamics and increasing appetite for consumerism, the women were compelled to share the burden of running a household, an aspect which the films could hardly neglect anymore. So breaking up from the narratives of courtesans and prostitutes, it was obligatory for the cinema to look for the real working women around, struggling in their day to day lives, and trying to break chains of unrealistic expectations enforced upon them by the patriarchal supremacy. But the number of films made on the issue is very few. Though the films like *Typist Girl* (1926) and *Nartaki Tara* (1922) were produced in the 1920s, the subsequent decades did not see the same level of concern.

Women in Hindi cinema have usually been stereotyped in two roles; that of a virtuous and traditional woman contrasted with a vamp, who indulges in all sorts of immoral and illegal activities. This extreme portrayal of women did not do justice with the idea of real women who stood in between in these two extremes; women who were neither supreme goddesses nor complete vamps. Realism in the portrayal of women characters was never a priority for the film producers who carried pre-conceived notions of ideal and immoral womanhood, perhaps to cater to the audience

demands. In the following decades, a number of popular films were made on the thrilling yet unfortunate lives of courtesans, the classic being *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) featuring Madhubala, *Pakeezah* (1972) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981) featured Meena Kumari and Rekha, respectively. These films centred around a long-vanished era when the beauty of a courtesan could supposedly change the course of the history of a state. *Mahanagar* (1963) by Satyajit Ray is one of the few films which had its theme based on the life of a working woman. The film attempts to explore the evolving independence of middle-class women. *Ek din Pratidin* (1979) by Mrinal Sen is a film effectively describing the hardship and toil of a woman who is permitted to earn for her family, though labelled as a woman of low morale for the same reason. In spite of the attempts of the filmmakers like Ray and Sen, the film industry has by and large failed in representing the struggles of middle-class women.

There have been some occasional and subtle films which have intricately dealt with the nuances of the female subconscious. Satyajit Ray produced *Charulata* (1964) which narrates the story of a lonely housewife who harbours platonic feelings towards her brother in law. She leads wealthy but secluded life and craves for companionship. The discussion on women in Hindi cinema will remain incomplete without the mention of *Parineeta* (1953), *Birj Bahu* (1954) and *Bandini* (1963) by the master narrator Bimal Roy. These films have been immortalised because of the grace and charm of their female protagonists. While all such individual films have contributed to the cause of women in Hindi cinema, as a whole such films remain in the minority.

The commercial Hindi cinema of the later decades has reflected the various aspects of womanhood through the character of the leading lady. The stereotypical image of virtuous women has been repeatedly evoked in the films like *Aurat* (1950), *Sati Savitri* (1968), *Maa* (1970), *Biwi Ho Toh Aisi* (1988), and *Pati Parmeshwar* (1988) which represented women as individuals without a mind of their own; who were sacrificial, inert, docile, and put their interest behind their families, usually their husbands. These women held on to their domestic life in spite of ruthless emotional and physical violence they had to tolerate. Though these films claimed to be criticising the practices of patriarchy; yet remained completely patronising. The grievances, wishes, aspirations, and desires of the protagonists had been completely absent from the scenario. *Abhimaan* (1973) revolves around the life of a female singer

(Jaya Bhaduri) who is more talented than her husband. Yet she gives up on her flourishing career to satisfy the male ego of her husband and save her domestic life from dismantling. Hindi films in the 1970s had some films where actresses were assigned the roles of working women. Jaya Bhaduri acted as a professional knives sharpener in *Zanjeer* (1973) and executed the role of a prominent vocalist in *Abhimaan* (1973), Rakhi as a secretary in *Trishul* (1978), Hema Malini as a tonga rider in *Sholay* (1975) and as a company manager in *Trishul* (1978). During the 1990s, working women in the film vanished, relegating them to the boundary of home.

Since then, their characterisation in the films and their contribution has changed significantly over time. From being dependent on their male counterparts to ask for independent substantial roles, to where they carry the storyline forward without the presence of any male lead. From the popular characters portrayed by Rekha, Sridevi, Madhuri Dixit to Karisma Kapoor, Priyanka Chopra, and Kangana Ranaut; roles for women in commercial cinema have undergone a sea change. They are louder in every sense; voice, verbalization, bodily gestures, sexual fierceness, and in terms of image building. More critically acclaimed actresses like Sahabna Azmi, Smita Patil, Tabu, Nandita Sen, Vidya Balan, and Kangana Ranaut have toiled hard to carve a niche for themselves in the film industry and also paved the way for better-crafted roles for other actresses.

The representation of women in Hindi films has undergone tremendous change and arrived at the point of being labelled as the representative of the New Woman. The journey of New Woman, in both Eastern and Western contexts, has come a long way. The New Woman is a product of modern commercial society, who revolts against the traditional and patriarchal setup. Her quest for identity remains the focus of all her actions. She resists being dominated and subverts the unwilling enforcement. This evolving New Woman has also shaken the foundations of old age institutions like marriage and motherhood and created a crisis in family and society. This thesis, in upcoming chapters, focuses significantly on how films as a representative medium have evolved to be the voice of this New Woman and serve as a crucial platform to discuss the role of silver screen images as a replica of changes in the lives of the real women. Clubbed with opportune postmodern socio-cultural ethos,

women have succeeded in turning the tables in their favour. Constant debate and discussion have given way to uncovering issues, which hitherto, had been neglected.

New Woman can be termed to be a phenomenon emerging out of the wider spectrum of feminism. It is a phenomenon that germinated in the West and subsequently spread across the globe. Having undergone multiple stages of alterations, the concept of New Woman has achieved a status of dignity and credibility. The notion of the emergence of New Woman finds its genesis in the long history of the struggle of the women for their due rights, subsequently termed as feminism. Elinor Burkett and Laura Brunell define feminism as “Feminism, the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests” (Burkett et al.).

Throughout Western society during the nineteenth century and before, women were restricted to the domestic sphere and barred from venturing into the conventional male domains. Karen Offen in his article *Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach* defines feminism as:

Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society. As the starting point for the elaboration of ideology, of course, feminism posits gender, or the differential social construction of the behaviour of the sexes, based on their physiological differences, as the primary category of analysis. In so doing, feminism raises issues that concern personal autonomy or freedom-with constant reference to basic issues of societal organization, which center, in Western societies, on the long-standing debate over the family and its relationship to the state, and on the historically inequitable distribution of political, social, and economic power between the sexes that underlies this debate. (152)

So, Feminism is usually defined as a political, cultural, legal, and economic movement aimed at bringing parity for women and establishing equal rights and legal

protection for women. The most basic tenet of feminism is that women should be treated equally to men. Discourse on feminism incorporates theories and philosophies primarily focusing on the issues revolving around gender. Dale Spender defines the term as “Defining feminism can be difficult and challenging but a broad understanding of it includes the acting, speaking, writing, and advocating on behalf of women’s writings, issues and rights and identifying injustice to females in social status quo” (34). According to Estelle B. Freedman, “Feminism is a belief that although women and men are inherent of equal worth, most societies privilege men as a group. As a result, social movements are necessary to achieve political equality between women and men, due to the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies” (7). Sara Margret Fuller states about feminism “What woman needs, is not a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given to her” (28). Virginia Woolf cites another interesting definition of feminism. She states “It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple: one must be a woman manly, or a man womanly” (104). In her book *Beyond God the Father* Mary Dale urges women: “To give up securities offered by the patriarchal system and to create a new space that would be woman-centred and is based on shared collective experience of all women-black and white, rich and poor living in the U. S., France, and England or in other third world countries” (228).

A feminist reader usually asks the following questions; how does a literary text represent women? What does it have to say about gender relations? How does it seduce a woman by its language which is predominantly patriarchal? How does it define the sexual difference? Or the text is simply silent about women- which in itself would be a comment on its apathetic attitude towards women? Moreover, what it means to be a woman writer, and to be a woman reader.

It was during the late 1870s that the term ‘Feminism’ or ‘feminist’ appeared in the Netherlands and France, as ‘les feminist’ in Great Britain during 1890s and in the United States during 1910s. Although it was as recent as during the 1960s that the debate around feminism garnered much widespread sincere attention, it was being used in public parlance much before that. The terms implied that the issues pertaining to women need to be addressed on exigency basis as an immense level of adverse

effects was being observed on the lives of women due to the lack of attention. The demand for suffrage and equal property rights did not necessarily address the working women's rights for equal pay rate and job security. In the US, women were granted the right to vote in 1920. After the success, the single-minded focus of the women's rights group diverted towards getting equal-rights amendment bill passed by the senate to further strengthen the cause of women's emancipation. Feminist movement witnessed tumultuous incidents in 1960s after which the movement reached a turning point in history. The scope of the Western feminist movement broadened in the wake of these incidents. During the same time, the word 'gender' instead of sex started to be used more commonly, indicating towards the idea that social conventions and not biological differences were more instrumental in formulating the notions about male and female.

Feminism was demarcated into three waves by Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker. The first feminist wave comprised of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second wave occurred during the decades 1960s and 70s, and the third phase is ongoing since 1990. It is through these feminist movements that the feminist film theory emerged from, manifesting in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history, and feminist literary criticism. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is termed to be the pioneer book in the field of feminist critique. J. S Mill in his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869) brings to the forefront of the oppression of women. Simone de Beauvoir states that "The first time we see a woman take up her pen in defence of her sex" was Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15th century" (34). Feminism is divided into three discernible phases, also addressed as the three waves of feminism:

- 1). First-wave Feminism: First-wave feminism refers to the increased feministic debate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States and the United Kingdom. The movement primarily focused on equal contract and property rights and the ownership of women by their husbands. However, during the late phase of the first wave, the focus diverted towards women's suffrage and property rights. The major literary output of the time focused on the strong political

arguments for women. In this phase, critics primarily involved themselves with the debate on the demeaning treatment of the female characters by the authors.

2). Second-wave Feminism: Whereas first-wave feminism primarily focused on suffrage and overturning the legal hurdles for women; the second wave broadened the debate by including the issues pertaining to sexuality, reproductive rights, issues related to domestic violence and marital rape, laws related to child custody, and divorce. 'Personal is Political' given by the feminist author Carol Hanisch became the slogan of the second-wave feminism.

3). Third-wave feminism primarily aimed to investigate the alleged failures of the second-wave feminism and formed a reaction against the second-wave initiatives. Third-wave feminism criticised the overemphasis of the second-wave criticism on the experience of upper-middle-class, first world, white woman. The critics from the third wave see women's lives as intersectional; determined by race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and nationality, all significant actors while discussing feminism.

Works like *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, *Thinking About Women* (1968) by Merry Ellman, *Sexual Politics* (1969) by Kate Millet, *The Female Eunuch* (1970) by Germaine Greer, *The Patriarchal Attitude* (1970) by Eva Figes, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) by Juliet Mitchell, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* (1985) edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and another book authored by them *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1975), *The Laugh of Medusa* (1975) by Hélène Cixous, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) by Elaine Showalter, *Sexual/Textual Poetics* (1978) by Toril Moi, *Literary Theory and Criticism* (2002) by Patricia Waugh form some of the landmark works in propagating the need of equality for women.

Feminism, like Marxism, is a political, social, economic, and cultural movement; another type of approach to literature. Feminism serves a challenge to a number of established ideas, including insight into the type and nature of patriarchy, power, hierarchy, division of work and labour, the role of gender, and re-evaluating the experiences of women. Feminism attempts a theoretical critique of patriarchal forces and the subsequent attempts by women to remove male domination from their personal, social, and professional lives. Contradicting the notion, Mary Becker in her

article *Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism* opines that oppression of women is not the sole point of patriarchy. She states:

A social system that is male-identified, male-controlled, male-centred will inevitably value masculinity and masculine traits over femininity and feminine traits. In such a system, men (and women) will be encouraged to regard women as beings suited to fulfil male needs. Other social systems of group-based oppression coexist with sexism in patriarchal structures. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, and many other variables structure inequality. Women, as well as men, are privileged or disadvantaged by their positions along with these variables. Women, as well as men, can oppress those in more vulnerable groups. How much privilege a person has depends on the social positions she occupies and how those positions are valued in her society. (45)

The notion of New Woman is an offshoot of the search on the larger domain of feminism. The idea of New Woman has its roots in the late nineteenth century. The phrase got eminence in 1894 during a debate between novelists, Sarah Grand and Ouida on the pages of *North American Review*. Subsequently, an article titled *The New Aspects of the Women Question* (1894) was published by Grand. Grand primarily focuses on the issues pertinent to the rise of the New Woman, addressing the duality and hypocrisy present in the Victorian society which emphasised on the sexual chastity of the women but preferred to overlook the same for men. These double standards intrinsic to the Victorian weddings formed the theme of her novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1894). After the term was coined, it became a sign to denote the new class of ambitious, independent, and educated women, who emphasised on the need of their life choices. The major issues of the debate were discussed throughout the remaining years of the nineteenth century and surpassed the geographical location to cover the places beyond the American continent. Gail Finney gives a concise description of the New Woman:

The New Woman typically values self-fulfilment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self-sacrifice; believes in legal and sexual equality; often remains single because of the difficulty of combining such equality with marriage; is more open



about her sexuality than the 'Old Woman'; is well-educated and reads a great deal; has a job; is athletic or otherwise physically vigorous and, accordingly, prefers comfortable clothes (sometimes male attire) to traditional female garb. (67)

In Victorian society, women were expected to stick to conservative middle-class women's careers of marriage and motherhood. They were not allowed to transgress the boundaries of class and gender. Ann Heilman attempts to define New Woman as:

Who or what was the New Woman? A literary construct, a press fabrication and discursive marker of rebellion, or a 'real' woman? A writer, social reformer, or feminist activist? A middle-class daughter eager to study for a career, a married woman chafing against legal inequality, a woman-loving spinster, a reluctant mother, a sexual libertarian? (3)

The rise of the New Woman was fundamentally a cultural and historical occurrence. It was a fin de siècle phenomenon. Fin de siècle conveys the end of an older order and massive divergence from the trodden path. Towards the end of the nineteenth century in Britain, this term did not signify a change of the set of dates rather a whole set of artistic, moral, and social concerns. Two good examples are, increase in literary interest and emergence of New Woman. The serious debate started on property rights, custody rights, marriage, divorce laws, education, and employment opportunities for women.

Ainslie Meares in her book *The New Woman* defines the New Woman as:

*What is the New Woman?* She is the product of the social evolution which is going on around us. . . . What are the basic characteristics of the New Woman?.. Above all she is striving for equality of opportunity with man to enjoy full life, and she seeks the right to make decisions for herself, the right to determine her own destiny. (34)

Manzoor Ahmed Wani, in his article, has attempted to define the New Woman. He states that the title 'New Woman' symbolises the awakening of women into the realisation that there is a possibility of carving her individuality and asserting her identity. He argues:

The term New Woman has come to signify the awakening of the woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society and be conscious of her individuality. The New Woman has been trying to assert and ascertain her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with men. Since her sense of individuality has been matured by the introduction of education, she declines to lead a passive life of a sacrificial and shadowy creature. Instead, she expects a measure of satisfaction and fulfilment. The New Woman started emerging in post-independence India, mainly due to the impetus given to women's education. The spread of education instilled a sense of individuality among women and made them aware of their rights. Economic independence motives made them realize their own aspirations. (14)

The concluding two decades of the twentieth century turned out to be a free-ranging revolution for women. Due to the transformation in the approach of society towards women on the idea of gender relations, the concepts of patriarchal domination were questioned and the modern idea of gender equality gained momentum.

In the Indian context, the history of women's emancipation began around the nineteenth century, although certain researchers emphasise that the question began much earlier than that. As the print publications made inroads into the lives of Indians, women's questions formed a predominant theme of discourse; first among the social reformers, followed by the nationalists and subsequently by all those who were concerned with the deplorable condition of women due to caste, gender, inequality, poverty, and economic non-viability. In her article, Vina Mazumdar divides this debate into five distinct phases. During the first phase, the need of women's emergence arose out of the questions revolving around status of women in the middle class educated lot, who were first to receive the English system of education. Treatment of widows, child marriages, and the lack of women education was the stumbling block and a blot on the 'modernised' Indians aping the lifestyle of the rulers.

In the second phase, during the 1870s onwards, the questions of women's rights increasingly got prominence due to the emphasis on nationalist and ethnic

ideologies. These traditionalists believed in preserving the indigenous cultural traditions while using women's education to attack the orthodoxy. Reformists like Jyotiba Phule and B. M. Malabari played an instrumental role in breaking the hegemony of higher castes and women's education. During the third phase, women's question got intermingled with the nationalist cause. They defied the norm of women not participating in the nationalist movement. Gradually, women's indulgence in the movement and their mass mobilisation towards nationalist cause became quite apparent.

In the next phase, women's issues primarily concerned with the emerging middle-class women. Mazumdar states in this regard:

The image of the suppressed, subjugated, and secluded Indian woman - Hindu or Muslim - that preoccupied the Indian literati and their counterparts in the west took no note of the millions of Indian women who formed the backbone of the Indian economy, and who were far greater victims of the colonial transformation of the economy than even the men in their family... It is surprising that their problems remained outside the concern of most reformers. It is even more surprising that historians who have applauded women's participation in the freedom movement as one of the achievements of Mahatma Gandhi have never gone beyond his charisma to provide an explanation for women's participation. (2)

The last phase, that is fifth one, focuses on the growing inequality and increased the crisis in the society, as the age witnessed the growing poverty, inequality, and the limited rights to the common people. A committee formed on The Status of Women in India (1971-74) highlights the increasing marginalisation and subjugation of the women in society. Mazumdar states in this regard:

The Committee found in the demographic trends of the declining sex ratio, the growing disparity in the life, expectancy and death rates of men and women, and in their access to literacy, education and a livelihood, indicators of "regression from the norms developed during the freedom struggle" and an increasing process, which was taking a

direction totally opposite to the vision put forward by the Fathers of our Constitution. (3)

Since then, the New Woman has traversed a long distance. In the present context the features of New Woman, typically defined as educated and middle class, including that she is a reformer who is aware of her position in the society. The key characteristics of the idea of New Woman viz. being Resistant, Autonomous, Resolute, Prudent, and Audacious, have been incorporated in the examination of the films. The New Woman emphasises upon economic independence, rationalisation and convenience of the system, refusal of thoughts steered by male-dominated traditions, and a call from the awareness of women's accountability and duties. The New Woman attempts to evolve a pattern of her own thinking process and does not blindly toe the line set for her by the male-oriented society. In one sense, she is a rebel, but she is also conscious of her strength as a female individual. Indeed, she is a woman in the entire social pattern, moral code, and spiritual realm. It is observed that "a New Woman is assertive and self-willed, searching to discover her true self" (Sheshadri 45). A Woman can be termed to be New if her basic concerns go deeper beyond being equal to men, asserting upon her personality and her rights as a woman. These are indeed crucial components of the definition of New Woman. But a woman has a better claim to being addressed as a New Woman when she has the ability to analyse and reflect upon her position in the scheme of things including moral, social, economic, and spiritual domains. She qualifies to be a New Woman when her reflections are not conditioned by the thought process controlled and appropriated by social, cultural, and moral order formed by men.

It is not that the urban middle-class New Woman does not suffer anymore, she does; but not in the silence as she used to. The New Woman seeks a balance where she attempts to retain her values and modifies herself as the circumstances demand, striving hard to seek and maintain her individuality. The disintegration of society, rising number of divorces, apathy towards life partners, live-in relationships, and frustrated and neglected children, seem to be the repercussions of this extremity. Therefore, it can safely be stated that if women are provided proper representation and truthful images of strong women, cinema would certainly become the strongest medium for the elevation of women. Political ideologies may fail in this purpose, but

cinema is quite likely to succeed in social amelioration, as it is the greatest vehicle for the propagation of thought in contemporary society. Tradition, transition, and modernity are the stages through which the New Women are passing. The contemporary woman is a mirror to the New Woman, who has been trying to throw off the burden of inhibition she has carried for ages. The 'Feminist Standpoint Theory' talks about women being 'situated knowers.' The women characters of the chosen films must be reviewed based on these observations. It must also be understood that such a discussion involving both the activism and academism of the women's movement is mandatory to comprehend the general term 'Feministic concern.' New Woman who is inclined to take 'the road not taken' is independent, assertive, and even defiant.

It was in the 1950s and 60s that the Indian women were able to make their presence felt in the social and political spheres of the country. Before this, the majority of the women were deprived of knowledge and education; hence they could not play an instrumental role in the events happening around them. But they did not let their ignorance and inaccessibility diminish their desires. These women in the front row strove for many progressive decisions in their favour and organised themselves to fight for a new set of goals. The struggle for gender equality, equal job opportunities, amendments in the law, and making it possible to create a society which did not oppress women intellectually, physically, and emotionally were the prime issues. There were no immediate breakthroughs in achieving these targets by the women activists and organisations. Despite facing the resistance from their male counterparts, they were gradually successful in igniting the flame of awareness and righteousness in the middle and upper-middle-class women. With the passage of time, the awareness spread to the lower circles of the existing political setup. From that point, women have been desperately trying to evolve a new identity; free from traditional patriarchal supremacy.

The New Woman has displayed an astounding grit and resistance in the postmodern era. Postmodernity and emergence of the New Woman in the Indian context have been a contemporary phenomenon. The present thesis intends to explore the missing explanation about the relation between the emergence of this New Woman, and the impact postmodernism has had on this emergence. Taking into

consideration the postmodern elements from the theory/ philosophy of Fredric Jameson, power as a tool exercised to control this emergence in the theory of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler's idea of performativity form the central reference point of the research. These postmodernist and feminist ideologies have brought a fundamental shift to our perceptions regarding art, culture, and knowledge. Along with that, our thinking and acting have been affected by political issues, both in public and in private. Another commonality between postmodernism and feminism is that both aim to neutralise the reception and interpretation of things which otherwise have been taken for granted; including language, images depicted in popular culture, notions of truth, self, and patriarchy. Another concept that feminists borrow from postmodernism is the interpretation of subjectivity. While postmodernism focuses on how the individual subjects get constructed, feminists focus on the gendered construction of the subject. Also, both feminism and postmodernism significantly "attack the discourses surrounding enlightenment, which mostly give prominence to white, Western, and male experience" (Waugh 23).

Along with the several similarities between postmodernism and feminism, there are certain turns where both the ideologies segregate their paths. Whereas postmodernism is essentially a non-political movement, feminism is based on an agenda which is political in nature. A major aim of the women writers/artists/filmmakers has been to change the practices in art/cinema, though they are completely aware of the fact that sexist projection cannot be done away with until exploitative and patriarchal social practices cease to exist. So, postmodernism is not a political movement, unlike feminism. Postmodernism is vague in political ideologies due to its practice of both complicity and critique. Postmodernism does not boast of any theory of positive action on a social level as all feminist positions do.

A major dissimilarity between the two is the way they view the deconstructive aspects. The deconstructive discourse is in the core of both postmodernism and feminism yet the postmodern deconstructive mode is anarchic and nihilistic as it fails to resolve anything. The postmodernistic model rejects all notions of any centre that claim to hold any undisputed fundamental truth. Consequently, we are left with no way of knowing the truth and do not hold any privileged position, so we can never know what justice is and how to achieve it. On the contrary, feministic practice

dealing with deconstructive analysis can be called 'positive deconstruction', in which attempt is made to decentralise cultural trends and binary resistances in order to make an improved society. Also, feminism does not believe in eradicating the notion of central or fundamental truth because their ideas are based on the notion that women have always been, and are still subjugated. Feminists believe that women need to have justice; they need consensus; hence, all meta-narratives cannot be discarded. Meta-narrative or universalising approaches are required to fight for and achieve basic human rights. Postmodernity is attributed with bringing huge changes to the notions of the body, identity, and the media; compelling for the rechristening of many feminist categories, including female experience, and the Self. Feminist analysis has been equally important, though not always equally recognised, as a force within postmodernism. Talking about the postmodern philosophy, Edwina Taborsky writes:

The Mediated concept of Truth is that it first admits that there is no such thing as absolute, pure Truth. There is a reality, which may be abstract or sensual but one cannot access it/know it 'in-itself'. One can only 'know' it within the socially constructed (or species-constructed) 'mediative-habits' of one's particular society/species/whatever. (32)

Postmodernism is arguably one of the most complex and allusive phenomena, almost impossible to be articulated comprehensively. The scope of postmodernism reaches far and wide to the studies of arts, philosophy, architecture, fiction, literary criticism, among all others. As a movement, postmodernism is believed to be a reaction against assumed certainty of objective or scientific efforts to arrive at any kind of absolute reality. The fundamental idea of postmodernism is that truth is not reflected in human consideration of it; rather is manufactured as the psyche creates its own subjective, particular, and individual reality. Due to this reason, postmodernism is highly cynical of any belief that claims to be applicable to all cultures, traditions, age groups, races, and genders. Rather it supports the idea of relative truth for each individual. In the postmodern world, interpretation is the crux of any so-called reality. Reality is not a factual entity; rather it comes to us as we interpret the world around us individually.

Postmodernism has no priority for abstract principles, rather it relies more on concrete experience. Invariably, the outcome of each individual's experience will necessarily be subjective and relative than certain and universal. The paradox of this

postmodern position is that, by putting all principles under scrutiny, even its own principles cannot escape questioning. As philosopher Richard Tarnas states, “Postmodernism cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself” (34). In order to understand the theoretical implications of postmodernism, it is crucial to correlate it with modernism. To cite an example, modernism represented the pessimistic, gloomy, and fragmented mood of the human life; while the postmodernist rather than lamenting the fragmented facet of life tried to celebrate it.

The term modernism is assigned to a movement that dominated the domains of arts and culture in the early twentieth century. Several attempts have been made to define modernism. The majority of the critics have termed it to be a digression from the irrelevant and outdated nineteenth-century beliefs. Wolfreys et al., in their book *Key Concepts of Literary Theory*, define Modernism as “A term referring to the literary, artistic, and general culture of the first half of the twentieth century. Modernism is distinguished by its general rejection of previous literary traditions; particularly those of the late nineteenth century and of bourgeois society” (56). J. A. Cuddon comments on the modernist tendency saying that it is an inclusive but unclear term referring to a movement that progressed in the final years of the nineteenth century. This tendency had a deep impact during most of the twentieth century. The term incorporates all forms of creative arts and architecture (551). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines it as “A general term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature and other art of the early twentieth century” (160).

In one of her articles, Mary Klages states about Modernism as:

Modernism has two facets or two modes of definition, both of which are relevant to understanding postmodernism. The first facet or definition of modernism comes from the aesthetic movement broadly called ‘modernism’. The movement is roughly coterminous with twentieth-century Western ideas about art. Modernism, as you probably know, is the movement in visual arts, music, literature, and



drama which rejected the old Victorian standards of how art should be made, consumed, and what it should mean. (57)

In England, modernism began as a reaction against hackneyed and orthodox Victorian morals and beliefs; subsequently deepening its appeal through the incorporation of the several novel techniques expounded by eminent modern writers, critics, and poets like T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Samuel Beckett, and Virginia Woolf. These modernist writings were heavily influenced by social, religious, political, economic as well as by existing general trends in the early twentieth century. So, modernism, as such an aesthetic movement is analysed on two different scales: 1. Related to a variety of movements in art as well as philosophy. 2. Related to general leanings in the early twentieth-century society. Both of these scales were critical in labelling the early twentieth-century phase in England as the Modern Age. Two major thinkers who played crucial roles in leading the modernism in Europe were Karl Marx and Charles Darwin. Both of these personalities brought about an instrumental shift in thinking in the fields of Political Science and Biology, respectively. Darwin's theory of evolution shook the unquestioned and unconditional faith in religious doctrines of the time and sense of human supremacy. On the other hand, Karl Marx forwarded a political version of the same ideal. Criticising capitalism, Marx accused basic disagreement within the capitalist ideology for the problems related to the economic structure and not the result of any temporary conditions.

Modernist critics, in the rapidly transforming developments in social sciences and science, found themselves to be alienated from what usually was addressed as Victorian morality. They looked around for the sweeping reactions to the sweeping changes occurring around them, affixing the belief in the innate ability of humankind to reform its destiny, society, and milieu through the aid of newly discovered technology, experimentation, and scientific aptitude. Also, they tried to identify potential obstacles in the search for 'progress' in order to update them with new alternatives. A general allegation against modernism has been that it negated religion and the ideas generated from the notion of enlightenment. On the other hand, it is more apt to perceive modernism as an opportunity to inquire and seek substitutes for the outdated beliefs and assurances of the previous age. Modernist poets like Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), some of the most emblematic and

reputed poets of the modern age, very methodically and coherently put forward the paradoxes and contradictions rife in the modernism. It can be exemplified by the unusual concurrence of opposite standpoints exhibited by both of them in their works. While Eliot emphasised on the necessity of indispensable nature of tradition in art, asserting on the need of acknowledgment of tradition by the artists; his contemporary Pound gave the clarion call to 'Make It New'. Peter Chides sums up this contradiction as "Paradoxical if not opposed trends towards revolutionary and reactionary positions, fear of the new and delight at the disappearance of the old, nihilism and fanatical enthusiasm, creativity and despair" (127).

The early modern period is characterised by the improvement in transportation and communication modes, advancement in scientific temper, increasingly rapid technological progress, secularized civic politics, and democratic states. The early modern period includes the Reformation, Thirty years' war (1614-18) along with the trade revolution, the colonisation of Americas by the Europeans, peak of European witch-hunt craze and the Golden age of Piracy.

The Modern era is further divided into the following stages:

1. The early period, discussed above, came to a conclusion with the beginning of the Revolution in the Industrial world in the mid-eighteenth century.
2. The next stage, the stage of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution in Britain began with the dawn of 'Age of Revolutions,' started alongside America and France.
3. Late modern age began with the culmination of these revolutions in the nineteenth century and included the phase of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War.

Modernist politics, art, culture, and science, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, had made its presence felt not only in the European continent but across the global boundaries. This era is immensely aligned towards individualism, urbanisation, capitalism, strong faith in the constructive output of scientific discoveries, technological advancement, and the progress in the political arena. Many problems of the era, including the brutal wars, arising out of the fast-paced changes and subsequent loss of traditional as well as religious and ethical beliefs, led to many

critical reactions against the modernist thought: like postmodernism has been very sharp in its critique of eternal optimism and progress, while postcolonial theory is critical of the supremacy of Western Europe and North America over other continents. Too many ambitions and the speeding up of life causing over-ambition and infinite belief in the ability and efficiency of humans to attain the best, led to modern-day anxieties and bewilderment. Regarding this, David Lyon writes:

The modern world is marked by its unprecedented dynamism, its dismissal or marginalizing of tradition, and by its global consequences. Time seemed to speed up and space open up. Modernity's forward-looking thrust relates strongly to belief in progress and the power of human reason to produce freedom. But its discontents sprang from the same source: unrealized optimism and the inherent doubt fostered by post-traditional thought. These, along with unintended effects of classifying, ordering and rationalizing modern life, clipped freedom's wings. (25)

Modernism, which had hardly made any substantial presence felt in the society earlier than the 1920s, defined the age in the post-war period. It came to fore in Europe through such critical movements as Dadaism, a very constructive movement as Surrealism, and relatively lesser dominant movement such as the Bloomsbury group. The 'modernist' movements, as some critics addressed them, emphasised on the need for innovative techniques to attain new results. Impressionism being a precursor, Surrealism, Leninism, Dadaism, and Cubism broke away from the boundary of national ideology and opted for international concerns. Exhibitions, books, buildings, and cinema, all contributed to the perception of the people that the world is changing. The change was not received without any reservation though and had to meet with the resistance quite often. Organising the riots at the launch of books, spitting on paintings, and political figures denouncing the modernism as immoral and unwholesome was a part of hostile reactions that the modernism had to face. Some writers labelled modernism to be soulless and mechanised; some others attacked the madness of the new modernism.

Nevertheless, by the 1930s, modernism had secured a place for itself in the establishment, in artistic as well as political establishment. By this time, modernism

had succeeded in entering the popular culture too. Due to the increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, modernism was looked up to have the solution to the modern-day challenges. People were mindful of swift changes occurring around. Anthony Toyne states about the ever-changing life of English people in the early twentieth century as:

England was changing and changing too fast for people to realize what was happening. There was a change everywhere. Bicycles or ‘bikes’ were followed by motor-bicycles and ‘motor-bikes’. Telephones were put in many houses. Cheap books, costing no more than sixpence each, were sold from the railway bookstalls. (317)

To quote Toyne again, “The modern age was an age of science and technological progress. Adventure and romance were gone, and even the peaceful things seemed lost. Being modern meant hurrying through life” (335). Popular culture fuelled much modernist innovation due to mass production, and not borrowed from high culture. Distinct from an ancient or medieval one, the idea of modern age relies on the belief that modernity is a result of a new type of change, not just another era in history. It is an attempt to have a drastic breakup from the past and deliberate efforts of humankind to better their lot through conscious measures. The old world seems to have transformed into ‘New World’ or ‘Modern World’ through exponential growth in the fields of industry, society, economics, commerce, science, art, psychology, sociology, medicine, mechanisation, technology, and culture.

Postmodernism has the multiplicity in the meaning of its concepts. Various interpretations of the concepts related to postmodernism are believed to be contradictory and overlapping with each other. *Dictionary.com* defines the term as:

A number of trends or movements in the arts and literature developing in the 1970s in reaction to or rejection of the dogma, principles, or practices of established modernism, especially a movement in architecture and the decorative arts running counter to the practice and influence of the International Style and encouraging the use of elements from historical vernacular styles and often playful illusion, decoration, and complexity. (“postmodernism”)

Merriam-Webster defines it as “Of, relating to, or being any of various movements in reaction to Modernism that are typically characterized by a return to traditional materials and forms (as in architecture) or by ironic self-reference and absurdity (as in literature)” (“postmodernism”). In his article *Postmodernism* in *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Robert Ray suggests the single most important thing about postmodernism “Unlike impressionism, cubism, expressionism, and even modernism; it cannot best be understood as simply another movement in the arts. Thus, the standard typological moves of literary criticism do not work very well while we distinguish postmodernism from its predecessors” (135).

As stated earlier, postmodernism is incredibly difficult to define and debates over several fields varying from music, culture, art, literature, and architecture. Consequently, art critics, anthropologists, film critics, sociologists, and linguists have different implications of the term. Postmodernism is defined by *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* as:

It refers to the phase of twentieth-century culture, particularly Western culture, that helped reign the ‘high’ modernism, indicating products of the age of mass- television since the mid-1950s. More often, though it is applied to a Cultural condition existing in the advanced capitalist countries since the 1960s, characterized by an abundance of interrelated images and styles-most noticeably in television, media, commercial design, music, and art. (201)

Definition of postmodernism given by J. A. Cuddon states “A general (and sometimes conventional) term used to refer to developments, changes and tendencies which have taken place (and are taking place) in literature, art, cinema, architecture, philosophy, etc. since the 1940s” (733).

Nietzsche, who is believed to be a major postmodernist announced that ‘nihilism stands at the door’ in 1888 (Lyon 11). The idea of nihilism finds close affinity with the notions of a multiplicity of the truth and inauthenticity of absolute reality. Postmodernism is an attack on all fields of life, whether in art, science, or philosophy. Another defining scholar who contributed to the idea of postmodernism is Martin Heidegger questioned the concepts of reason and logic. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, Terry

Eagleton, Judith Butler are other prominent names in the field of history and development of postmodernism.

The debate over the relation of postmodernism with modernism has been all-pervasive in academic circles. Postmodernism is generally perceived from two sides: 1. Postmodernism follows modernism, hence follows 'Enlightenment'. 2. It owes its origin to modernism. Diame Elam states, "Postmodernism does not simply happen after modernism but is a series of problems present in modernism in its continuing infancy. It might be understood as popular modernism" (9-10). Many perceptible features of modernism are shared by postmodernism. However, there are essential differences between both. The perceptions of both modernism and postmodernism are identical, but their reactions to it are different. In the article, *Some Attributes of Postmodernist Literature*, Prof. John Lye states, "Postmodernism flourished as a response to modernism, especially, in the context refusals of some of its totalizing premises and effects, and of its implicit or explicit distinction between high culture and low culture" (112).

Postmodernism, thus, stands for the very influential cultural and literary phenomenon of the 1980s. It features a diversity of interest and acts as a force against modernism. It introduces such moods as a sense of alienation, fascination for hidden and absurd, and scepticism. Postmodernism attempts to fill the gap between high elite culture and low popular culture by encompassing the elements of contemporary popular culture, primarily science fiction, psychology, pornography, pulp fiction, and pop music. Postmodernism has released art from elitist assumptions and encouraged alternative opinions, expressions, and points of view. It has prompted studies in the fields of discourse analysis, post-structuralism, subalternity, diaspora, multiculturalism, and others:

Certain characteristics that can be included to define postmodernism are:

- I. Scepticism about institutions of power and authority.
- II. The fascination for fragmentation, absurdity in the form of parody, irony, and Pastiche
- III. Questioning of identity, ethnicity, race, gender, sense of alienation.
- IV. Magic realism

- V. Dealing with taboo issues like pornography, sexual identity, blurring of conventional form.
- VI. Rejection of elitism, high culture, Europe centric meta-narratives.
- VII. Visiting the past with irony.
- VIII. Self- reflexivity, narcissism.
- IX. Rise of consumerism and globalisation.
- X. Use of music, television, internet and other forms of electronic media.
- XI. Propagation of pop fictions through the hybridity of styles.

Postmodern cinema emerged in the 1980s and 90s as a powerful creative force in Hollywood filmmaking, helping to shape the assimilation of media culture, technology, and consumerism. Deviating from a modernist cultural tradition based on the idea of enlightenment, norms of industrialised society, and the faith in historical progress; postmodern cinema is characterised by disjointed narratives, a dark bleak view of human condition, death of the hero, images of random violence & chaos, dystopian view of future, and emphasis on technology over content. The postmodern film does not dictate the mindset of the audience, rather influences them for unconventional interpretation and ideas.

Visual power and development of films spread along with the spread of postmodernism. Influenced by the advancement of technology and media, in the postmodern era, people tend to 'watch' than 'read'. The role of television, films, and the internet is more penetrating than the previous age. The visual activity has become an obsession, and focus has gradually shifted to digital and electronic stimuli. The author, the individual, secured the predominant place in modern films and the accessibility of reality itself than the postmodern films. A prominent feature of the postmodern film is that it upsets the mainstream conventions of characterisation and narrative structure, and then rebuilds the structure into a new structure that has less recognisable form. This new form aims at playing with the audience's doubts and leaves the narration and interpretation open-ended. Postmodern cinema negates the notion of high art and low art, generally creating a sense of perplexity among the viewers.

Some film theorists have been quite critical of the cynical responses postmodern films have been receiving. Postmodernism poses serious difficulties and challenges to anyone who tries to define its precepts in a straightforward fashion. The hallmark feature that makes a film postmodern is a blur between reality and fiction, but some critics called it 'complicated' 'complex', or even worse, 'chaotic'. Postmodern cinema represents a world where history or reality is temporary; it is no longer a world of eternal truths, rather a series of construction, imitation, visions, and broken irregular narrative. The audience has the liberty to play the imagination and has the privilege to decide the ending of the story. The absurdity of a postmodern film tends to lead the audience into the confusion between reality and fiction, and that may cause frustration among the audience, resulting in a decline of the interest among them for such cinema. Nonetheless, perpetual human inquisitiveness, fascination for things hidden and enchanting, make the production of such movies possible. The movie *Time Travellers Wife* (2009) directed by Robert Schwentke, is one of the finest examples of a postmodernist film. The film has an unusual pattern in its narrative structure as the lead character goes back and forth in time. Another iconic postmodernist movie, directed by Quentin Tarantino, is *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Quentin Tarantino is considered to be the master of postmodernist cinema. *Pulp Fiction* is a murky comedy film, not distinguishing between positive and negative world, rather it tries to wipe out the demarcation completely. Several techniques including Pastiche, Homage, Parody, Intertextuality, and Bricolage are used by postmodern cinema. Written and directed by Tom Tykwer, *Run Lola Run* (1998) is also a postmodernist film known for its efficacy in editing and time-bending.

A postmodern film challenges the conventional modes of narration and portrayal in which there is less recognisable logic. Films maintain conventional elements to convey their desired meaning and to keep the film audience-oriented. When a variety of film making styles and genres are assembled together by a producer, director or editor; usually building a film like a collage of different film styles and genres, it is called Bricolage. Another technique of filmmaking, Historical meta-fiction refers to novels that fictionalise actual historical events and characters. Time distortion in a film is the leap in time forward and backward.



Postmodernism in a visual culture like cinema offers a more dynamic and wider understanding of contemporary representation than any other mode. These films tend to push forth and back inside their own stories with plenty of abstract ideas and senses. These are erratic, noir, dark, and even at times, absolutely incomprehensible. A postmodernist film might not even have a direct message at all, and the rather different audience is free to infer a message out of the storyline.

The postmodern tendency has enabled the cinema to adopt new critical tools in India. The stress on figural and hyper-realism provides the audience with a sublime experience and excites them, even though the traditional Hindi films are focused on portraying the cultural identity of India, such movies have a tendency to blur the difference between old and new, Indian and Western, and are more focused on depicting the 'global' Indian identity. Even though remaking is a prevailing feature of Hindi cinema in recent decades, so much so that it operates as a genre in its own right. This concept still persuades the filmmaker to recreate stuff in yet another innovative manner and not a mere copy.

Since the women's liberation in the 1960s and afterward, their political-cultural, social, and economic life has undergone a dynamic shift, seemingly giving them an equal footing as men in most aspects of life. Nonetheless, the male supremacy in the film industry, like most of the other industries across the globe, is quite apparent in the postmodern Hindi cinema. While women have made remarkable progress, how much of the progression has been translated into the popular media and culture? Radio, television, films, and other modes of media are the resources through which we project our identities, our sense of being, and our perception to be what it means to be male or female. Because of the power that these products possess, it is crucial to see what message these products are circulating about women. Images, particularly cinematic images, tend to have a profound influence on our state of mind and are represented in a manner that touches us (Alcolea-Banegas 259). It needs to be observed whether these images display a realistic portrayal or promote traditional and normative images. Postmodern Hindi films' depiction of women, though adhering to patriarchal supremacy at times, has managed to bring about a revolutionary and fundamental change in the perception about women.

Now, more than ever, Hindi film actresses are subjected to unattainable heights of physicality, behaviour, and beauty among many others. Basically, they are expected to have it all, at least on screen. While most of the film productions are just entertainment; their role in shaping and promoting identities cannot be denied. Many cultural ideologies, fantasies, communal norms, and past realities are constructed and propagated through films, so the way in which they represent women is of utmost importance. The advent of satellite TV in the 1980s suddenly changed the world view of the spectators. Pop music, MTV, and foreign images became a part of the everyday viewing experience. Descriptive and narrative cinema suddenly gave way to more dominant images. Fundamentally, consumerism is set to objectify masculine beliefs and ideas. Masculinity here can be defined as the physical aggression and muscular body. The collage and visual spectacle have taken over as obligatory dance and song sequences through baffling international locales disrupting the viewer's idea of time and locale. The gratification element is generating dominance over the narrative.

How the postmodern women are represented in the media in a society is a matter of significant concern as negative stereotyping and the neglect of the female perspective reinforce gender inequality. A number of researches on gender and cinema have focused on the question of women's identity and subjugation. Interestingly, how the women were represented in cinema formed a concern of the 'Second-wave feminism' of the 1960s and 70 (Jackson and Jackie 34). Across the various forms of arts including cinema, burdened by incoherence and myth, women have been represented in typified and conventional roles. The conventional roles of being a wife, mother, beloved, daughter, sister, and several other such roles comprise the major part of scriptwriting. Cinema is interpreted to be a practice representing myths about womanhood and manhood. Eminent critic Claire Johnston opines that the 'woman' as a sign is open to be interpreted as a combination of several codes, structures, and beliefs. These codes and beliefs represent the principle meaning that 'woman' has for men. Women are usually projected to be as 'not-man', means lacking what man has. Ironically, the woman as a self-sufficient entity is absent from the text of the film (26). It is stated that usually women in cinema are often flimsy, susceptible, and compliant. It is perceived that they constantly need male assistance to fight against the adversities. In the genre of horror cinema, the women are often

projected to be as frightened, anxious, and petrified women who would escape from the scene rather than confronting the fear. Such women are given a chance to be strong and imposing only forced by the circumstances (Brewer 30).

These new postmodern economic realities and the socio-cultural reactions to them, cinema as a part of this reaction, have had different implications for both men and women. Since the perspectives and experiences of women were generally excluded from the theory, so the major feminist critics have been females. Asserting on the need of a feministic understanding and analysis of the texts, in this case, texts in the form of films, a comprehensive female perspective is required. As there have been conscious attempts to shift the focus of social theories away from masculine perspectives and experiences, feminist theories have created more room for social theories that are more inclusive and creative than those which assume to be the primary determinant to be always a male. One such theorist is Elaine Showalter, who necessitated the female perspective. The films analysed in the upcoming chapters all require a feministic interpretation in order to grasp the role and status of women in society in postmodern India; as represented by the medium of film.

Elaine Showalter has been a prominent voice instrumental in raising the issues of women. Showalter is attributed to be a well known literary critic, feminist, and a prominent writer on the issues of women. Showalter, one of the most well known feminist critics in the academia of the US, is credited with developing the concept and practice of gynocritics. She is relevant to the thesis as Showalter's feministic stance of "a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories" (Showalter, "Feminist Poetics" 131) forms the basis of feministic approach of the research. She emphasised on the notion that the primary investigation of gynocritics is to develop new models that will be based on the female experience. Such models ought to replace the older male models of literary creations. A survey of feminist icons, Showalter authored a book *Inventing Herself* in 2001 which is termed to be the culmination of a long-standing interest in the popularity of the importance of understanding the feminist culture. Through her feministic critique, Showalter's works believe in creating a foundation on which a trail could be carved for all the future academic pursuits so that a discipline's past could be accorded a base. Showalter's

primary concerns and objections are about the stereotypes of feminism that feminist critics are obsessed with the phallus and are out to destroy male artists. She coined the term 'gynocritics' to give prominence to the feminine perspective. Showalter opines that all along the past of literary criticism, male critics can be accused of creating stereotypes of women. Hence there is a need for learning what women have felt and experienced in the past. No significant study reveals what women feel; rather only what men believe the ideal woman to be like. Most of the critics have projected the subjugation of women to be inevitable and obsessive topic of discussion. It is on the basis of this ideology that the films will be assessed and the awakening, suffering, defeat, despondency, and subsequent emergence as a fighter are some of the elements on which the female protagonists will be analysed.

New critical outlooks and modes of exegesis have been brought to the forefront with the realisation that feminism is a global and extremely relevant ideology. Any reading characterised as feminist primarily focuses on asking such rudimentary questions as to how the sexual notions are defined in a text, its perception regarding existing gender relations, and how women are represented in it. Gradually, feminist criticism has started to be acknowledged as a discourse having political implications. The primary concern of feminist criticism is to depict the struggle against patriarchy and gender subjugation. To further explain upon her point, Showalter refers to two models of reading- gender and politics- which gain prominence in the advent of feminine perspectives. Arguably, the primary focus of the feminist philosophers is to accord value to the experiences of women and their interests. They effectively want to change their position to subject from object. In her essay *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (1981), Showalter categorises feminist criticism in two modes; the first mode where feminists act as a 'reader' is called ideological mode. This mode focuses on the feminist reading of the texts which are particularly written by males. The major emphasis is on "images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism" (Showalter, "Feminist Criticism" 245).

Showalter borrows the French term 'la-gynocritique' to formulate her notion of 'gynocritics'. She uses it to mean woman as an author and a critic "woman as a writer - with a woman as a producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes,

genres, and the structures of literature by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problem of a female language. No term exists in English for such a specialized discourse, and so I have adapted the French term ‘la gynocritique’- gynocritics” (403).

The approach of feminist criticism studying the women as authors has subject matters like “history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (Showalter, “Feminist Poetics” 248). Due to the lack of representability in male-authored texts and a stereotypical treatment, feminist critics looked out for other avenues including women authors, where the issues of women were not termed to be the narratives claiming universality and equality. In order to develop its unique identity, feminist criticism identifies women’s writings as its distinctive text-milieu. The second mode primarily views women’s writings as a mode of resistance

Showalter, while attempting a study of feminist critique, classifies three phases, viz. feminine, feminist and female. The feminine phase (1840-1880) highlights the concerns which are distinctively feminine, even if based on the imitation of prevalent masculine models. These phases involved the reading of texts in order to comprehend the image of women in literature and to chalk out the beliefs and stereotypes related to women highlighted and popularized by literary texts. It serves as a mode of analysis and has been quite relevant in inferring the relationship of women to literature. Showalter asserts that feminist criticism heavily relies on male perceptions of creative theory i.e., works and interpretations produced on the basis of male experience. This needs to be changed to achieve feminist criticism that is woman-centric, independent, and intellectually viable.

The feminist phase (1882-1920) analyses women as writers. In this phase, several aspects of female inventiveness and female literary trends are studied in detail. However, identifying the distinctive elements of women’s writings again poses a problem.

The third phase or the latest one called the female phase is ongoing since the 1920s. Here women have been rejecting both protest and imitation. Both are considered a sign of dependency by Showalter as both realise the place of female

experience in the process of literature and art. She emphasises on the need for what she calls autonomous art that can come from women because their experiences are typical and individualistic. Here, women began to concentrate more on the forms and techniques of literature and art. Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, the prominent figures from the female phase, began to think of male and female sentences, as they wrote about masculine journalism and feminine fiction. Both redefined and sexualised external and internal experience. Showalter comments “In contrast to an angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (125).

Gynocriticism’s fundamental belief is that gender defines all writing today. Feminist critics also believe that it is impossible to refute the fact that they are unaffected by being women, however much they feel the need to recognise that meaning of gender needs to be interpreted within a variety of historical, national, racial, and sexual contexts; women cannot renounce their gender entirely. Women can prefer to categorise themselves from a number of stereotypes in terms of being black, lesbian, postcolonial, or hippie, but negating their womanly identity entirely is not advisable. The need to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature and to prioritise female experience is the major focus of gynocriticism.

There is a clear, obvious, and very discernible attempt made by filmmakers to create a subversive reading of the concerns of the women through the channel of cinema that has traditionally been dominated by male professionals and their techniques/practices. In the domain of language and literature, that is believed to be masculine and an expression of patriarchal ideologies, Peter Barry states that the female writer is restricted by the condition of having acutely less access to a medium which is primarily a male apparatus in designing patriarchal discourses (106). Women must write about themselves and how they feel. It is vital that women make attempt to channelize their innermost sentiments and beliefs. This understanding of language can be extended to films as well.

This thesis is an attempt to understand how the protagonists of the select films have been made an instrument for manipulating the medium of cinema to state the

agenda for women, to explore how they have struggled and survived the ever-changing, generally hostile, social situations; fulfilling the above-mentioned ideas of gynocriticism. The language and gestures in these films acquire a much wider connotation than normal usage. The language here means the cinema in both form and content (the narrative). Cinema, by virtue of being a constantly dynamic medium consumed by a large mass, requires to be explored at length to understand the running threads that connect the way women are represented and the emergence the New Woman is experiencing in the postmodern world. Showalter calls upon critics to trace various imageries, themes, metaphors, and plots to trace the connections of women's writing through different time periods as well as geographical boundaries to form a unified and rich tradition the same as conventionally accepted male literary norms. Most of the feminist theories preceding gynocriticism were perceived to be of a masculine practice. Gynocriticism is assumed to be a reaction against such theories, and certainly a reaction to the Freudian theory of phallogentrism. The theory suggests that women were, or felt to be lesser than men and that, to be creative (or produce seed), women were bound to 'act masculine'. Also, gynocriticism debunked the idea of phallogentrism as a socially constructed gender bias. Both postmodernist and feminist perspectives have brought about an instrumental change in the way culture, art, and knowledge has been interpreted and how political ideology permeates our thinking and acting. Femininity is a result of patriarchal discourses and cultural construct, resistant to the notion of masculinity and the construction 'man'. Whereas, in reality, women are different and diverse from each other due to several aspects like ethnicity, geographical location, age, class, and sexuality.

### **Review of Literature Past and Present:**

The review of literature is an indispensable part of the study of the area of research to be conducted. It assists in understanding the issues raised therein and helps in probing the boundaries of related fields. The study of related literature investigates the domain that has been researched and gives further insight into the scope of the subject. The previously conducted research prepares a researcher to move ahead in the field of research. An attempt has been made to review the related literature in the area of feminism, films, and postmodernism. The observation gained by seeing the films

directly forms the primary sources. A number of books, articles, and web sources are utilised as resources for the purpose.

*Beginning Film Studies* (2008) by Andrew Dix, serves as a base book. The book offers the most comprehensive, thorough, and updated information on the intricacies of film studies. The book has been written in a lucid and witty manner, reviewing the significant trends in film studies' past and present and looks ahead to the future. The book focuses on the huge range of discussions varying from references to film cultures to 'classical' Hollywood, to the 'New Wave' cinema to the Indian film industry, focusing on stars like Marilyn Monroe, a variety of genres including noir, romance, and action. It also examines phenomena such as production and consumption of cinema. Each chapter of the book focuses on the other essential elements, full bibliographies, stop and think sections, and lists of appropriate websites. Wide-ranging and amusing, the book takes pride in being placed alongside the other bestselling titles published in the series.

Tejaswini Ganti, in her book *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (2004) outlines the background and functioning of the Hindi film industry and debates on the various stages of development of Hindi filmmaking since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She opines that the term 'Bollywood' refers to the extensive Hindi language film industry based out of Mumbai (12). Featuring extravagant music, expensive actors, dance sequences, sensationalism, and prolific productions, Hindi films have met with box office success and received by an enthusiastic audience from across the globe. Providing an updated commentary on the prominent figures in the industry, including music composers, producers, and stars, the areas covered in the Hindi film industry include a flash on history of Indian cinema, its popular themes, and modes of production and distribution of films.

The idea that women have marked a considerable change in their image in society and they have no longer been self-sacrificing door-mats is put forward by Suman Kumari in her article *Female Actress in Lead Role in Bollywood Movies: The Portrayal of Indian Women through Commercial and Parallel Cinema* (2013). Subsequent to a long struggle, they have emerged as a powerful, independent, and confident self who are bold enough in their expression of every emotion be it love,



anger, passion, resentment, pleasure, elation or anything that they were known to be silent about.

In *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance* (2010), Pavitra Sundar highlights how Hindi movies and their hallmark song-and-dance sequences appeal to the people all across the globe. She states that old Hindi film music currently provides tunes for remixes and music bands. Not only this, Hindi film songs have inspired scenes in Western films such as *Avtaar* and *Life of Pi*. The author analyses the reception of Hindi film music in places as diverse as Germany and Turkey, offering a stimulating redefinition of globalization in context with films, while also discussing the Cultural influence of Hindi film music till today.

Patricia White in *Women's Cinema, World Cinema* (2015) investigates the dynamic interconnection of feminism and film in the current century by highlighting the work of a budding generation of women directors from across the world. The occurrence of film festivals across the globe has enabled young directors to make and circulate films that are challenging feminist ideologies. Also investigating the production and reception contexts of a variety of feature films, White explores how women filmmakers both influence and incorporate gendered concepts of authorship, taste, genre, national identity, and human rights.

Geoffery Nowell-Smith's book *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (1991) is a "treatise on the history of cinema" in which he writes about the facets of its development, the role of film stars, the necessity of studios, finances, and the Cultural impact of cinema in society. He also writes about the "inventions and growth of business in cinema" (27) over the period of over a century which is an invaluable "trawl and source for tracing the history of world cinema" (32).

In *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (1989), a symbol of a keyhole and the women are used to depict the status of the women by Judith Mayne. She states that while imagining a 'woman' and a 'keyhole,' women are usually presumed to be on the other end of the keyhole. Judith Mayne is not attempting to reverse the traditional image. Yet, she wonders about the experience when women are positioned on both sides of the keyhole

Neelam Sidhar Wright's *Bollywood and Postmodernism: Popular Indian Cinema in 21 Century* (2015) presents a detailed analysis of the impact of postmodern

tendencies on Hindi cinema. The book declares the arrival of ‘New Bollywood’, but also asserts that the postmodern impulse often discourages film scholars from theorising its aesthetics. While applying the postmodern concepts and locating postmodern motifs in prominent commercial Hindi films, this unique study reveals how Indian cinema has changed in the 21st century. The book imparts a very influential and practical insight into the world of Hindi postmodern cinema. But the focus is on Hindi cinema in general, not on the position of women in specific.

Kathleen M. Barbara in her thesis, *Postmodern Body in Cinema* (1993) analyses several films that reveal new and intricate views over the female body. She observes that a variety of bodies including maternal body, clothed body, naked body, and psychologically and culturally formed body display the evolving female psyche. She explores how female leads in these films, whether re-writing their own tales, evolving their own methods to transform their sex within patriarchy, or changing their femininity redefine their gender. And while doing so, the postmodern female body surpasses her allocated gender roles (iii).

While talking about the relevance of the title of her book, Germaine Greer, in her book *The Female Eunuch* (1970) states that “The title is an indication of the problem. Women, have somehow, been separated from their libido; from their faculty of desire and from their sexuality” (32). The central tenet of the book is that the traditional family is damaging to both women and children, as of right from the start, girls are subjugated by being taught supposedly female behaviour, which is nothing more than a device by males to keep them in check. The book was a clarion call to change that galvanized a generation. When the book was first published, it created a shock wave among women, one that could be felt around the world. *The Female Eunuch* went on to become an international bestseller, translated into more than twelve languages, and a landmark in the history of the women's movement. The book emphasised on the idea that sexual liberation is the key to women's liberation. Greer looks at the inherent and unalterable biological differences between men and women as well as at the profound psychological differences that result from social conditioning.

Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1992) emphasises that privacy, space, and financial resources are pre-requisites for a woman writer. She

writes that materialistic disadvantages render women “bereft of thinking, sleeping, and dining appropriately”. The author states that finances and adequate privacy are the keys to the identity, cerebral richness, and happiness of a woman writer.

Simone de Beauvoir’s masterwork *The Second Sex* (1949) is an iconic testament of the Western notion of womanhood and groundbreaking analysis of otherness and inequality. The new English edition of the book has re-incorporated significant portions of the original French text which were subsequently omitted from the first English translation. Classic in its own terms, Beauvoir’s classic testament of feminism remains as relevant today as it was when published approximately six decades ago, It is also believed that it will continue to inspire and stir generations of men and women to come.

*Sexual Politics* (1969) by Kate Millet alleges that patriarchy is a socially conditioned belief system projecting to be a part of human nature. The author represents how patriarchy and its systems penetrate the social institutions including literature, philosophy, psychology, and politics. Millet’s work challenges the validity of the literary canon for their use of gender to degrade women.

Susan M. Cruea in her article *Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-century Woman Movement* (2010) explores one of the root movements that resulted in the possibility of the scope for the emergence of the New Woman’, as she is termed today. She states that ‘feminism’ as is known today, was non-existent in nineteenth-century America. Cruea states that to register their defiance, to make their presence felt, to make themselves more relevant, enlightened women steered in the ‘Woman Movement’ during the mid-nineteenth century (32). Primarily, the aims were to commence the channel of liberal compassion, restraint, and to begin the fight for civil rights, free social conduct, right to higher education, equal pay packages, and voting rights. The need for these goals resulted from women's growing awareness of the instability of their condition in the male-dominated society of the 1800s. Cruea states that at this time, women were the most common recipients of discrimination based on social and economic status. Women’s, primarily upper and middle-class women's, options were restricted; reducing them to the condition of marriage and motherhood, or at best spinsterhood. Both of these choices ended in their domestic dependability on their male providers.

Ann Heilmann, in her *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000), attempts to investigate the notion of New Woman in the recent works of female writers. The book immensely contributes to this ever-growing phenomenon. The book incorporates a wider range of issues and texts; more than any other recent work based on the theme. She, compared to the previous writings, locates the texts and author more competitively in the context of late-nineteenth-century 'second phase' of feminism. The book also attempts to draw parallels between the first phase and the second phase of feminism, while attempting to figure out the common ground between the two. This has simultaneously broadened and delimited the scope of debate on the New Woman.

In *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle*, Sally Ledger debates about the notion of The New Woman of *fin de siècle* who had multiple identities. Ledger states that she was a feminist activist, a suffragette playwright, a poet, and a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth century women's movement. In her book, Ledger forwards the notion that the textual representation of the New Woman did not coincide with the contemporary feministic ideology. She states that in this debate, a lot of material, themes, and authors have been excluded.

Vina Mazumdar in the article *Emergence of the Women's Question in India and the Role of Women's Studies* (2010) attempts to investigate the emergence of women's questions like untouchability and communal questions emerged during the nationalist movement. She delineates the historiography of the emergence of the New Woman in the Indian context. These were the political questions that were to be answered if the vision to shape up free India was to be realised. Mazumdar contends that these questions lacked sufficient attention from historians. The central focus of women's studies in the present context is to resolve this ignorance.

M<sup>a</sup> Carmen Africa Vidal in her article *Towards a Postmodern Feminism* (1991) ponders over the importance the whole intellectual world attaches to the postmodern and feminist movements in all kinds of fields: philosophy, sociology, and literary criticism. However, she states that there is no unanimous agreement, but rather a state of fierce argument, on the ways in which two are related and similar. Vidal states that the most important ground shared by feminism and postmodernism, is the rejection by both movements of status quo, of dominant systems, of the idea of

enlightenment, and the definition of the concept of the knowledge (83). She states that the only certainty one can have with regard to postmodernism is that it exists and that it has provoked many violent arguments. She states that postmodern feminists believe that it would be a mistake if the subject-category were accepted again, if typical masculine categories are used and accepted, and if the dichotomy which has eventually lead to such a degradation of women is not challenged directly. She states that feminists' another criticism is that postmodernism has no political programme as it has given up on values, no longer believes in the linear discourse, in a single definite truth but talks of simulacrum and the end of social interaction (88).

In *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (2008) Christopher Butler gives a very concise introduction of the history and dissemination of postmodernism. He challenges and explores the key concepts of postmodernism and its relationship to literature, cinema, architecture, film studies, and other fields. The book covers a wide range of writers, theorists, and artists including Cindy Sherman, Jacques Derrida, Salman Rushdie, and Walter Abish. In the book, Butler refrains from excessively engaging in positive or negative aspects of postmodernism. The book investigates varied realms of postmodernism including philosophic, aesthetic, and political. The writing of Butler while elaborating on the key concepts is lucid and perceptive.

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (2015), Brian McHale attaches a specific date to the evolutionary notion of postmodernism when he says postmodernism began in 1966, reached its zenith in 1973, and started to fade as a movement in 1979, while finishing on Sept. 11, 2011. Now, being at the distance from the movement, we are able to decipher its characteristics more efficiently. He states that specific dates are useful "to experiment, to provoke, to make strange" (29). The book acts as a follow-up to McHale's earlier attempt at the debate on postmodernism in *Postmodernism Fiction*, published in 1987, what he calls 'interregnum', the post-peak period. The book is comprised of five chapters, focusing on the chronological evolution of postmodernism.

Linda Hutcheon begins her article *Feminism and Postmodernism* (1989) by outlining briefly the particular conjunction of feminism and postmodernism. For the purpose, the model that she uses is what she calls 'parodic', historically allusive recalling of the past of the architectural forms that are called postmodern architecture.

She narrates her personal account where her parents, who moved to Canada before her birth had to renegotiate their culture and language, but she did not have to. Yet, she believed, her ethnic roots always remained central to her identity, what she calls 'cryptoethnic' (25). Because of these ethnic roots, the postmodern refocusing on the marginal and marginalized interested her personally. Being a woman added another marginalized dimension to her interest. The two concerns-ethnic and feminine-also turned out to be important in the art and literature she was studying (26). She states:

Feminist practice-in theory, criticism, and art itself-has posed new questions regarding the role of culture in the construction of patriarchy. It has addressed the tacit definitions of gender, class, culture that are operative-and dominant-at any given historical moment. It has joined with the postmodern in moving us away from general universal Truth, to specific, contextualized truths. It has forced us to see gender in relation to race, class, ethnicity and other forms of power relations-not as natural, unchangeable power relations, but as constructed by particular social, economic and political forces. It has overlapped with our postmodern concern for exposing the relationships between meanings produced at the level of culture and meanings produced at other levels of the social formation. (37)

She does not want to argue over a relationship of identity between the postmodern and the feminist; there is little doubt in her mind as to the commonality of their concern.

Angela McRobbie in her article *Young women in Consumer Culture: An Intervention* (2008) discusses the feminist's response to consumer culture, focusing significantly on her own works. She criticises feminist writings in the last decade for being more focused on feminine pleasure than dealing with real issues. The article is divided into four parts. The first section acts as an introduction in which McRobbie introduces her theme and her objectives.

### **The gap in the present and past research:**

Many writers have attempted a critique on the emergence of the New Woman in cinema, but there is no comprehensive and full-length study done considering the postmodern postulates. In this research specific tenets of postmodernism have been

taken up to analyse the metamorphoses the projection of women has undergone in recent decades and how it has assisted them in being more in control of their destinies.

Several studies have been conducted on the position of women in Indian society and Hindi cinema, yet none undertook the considerations of postmodernity in it. Books, theses, and articles like *Women and Their Portrayal in Indian Cinema* by Mana Tabatabai Rad, *Deconstructing Gender Roles in Bollywood: Through Women's Empowerment Development Discourse* by Nudrat Raza, *Looking for the past in Pastiche: Intertextuality in Bollywood Dance and Song Sequence* by Usha Iyer, *An analysis of Hindi women-centric films in India* by Srijita Sarkar, *Changing Roles of Women in Indian Cinema* by Ruchi Agarwal, *Female Actress in Lead Role in Bollywood Movies: The Portrayal of Indian Women Through Commercial And Parallel Cinema* by Suman Kumari have been some of the most credible and authentic works studying the position of women in Hindi Cinema. But none of these or such other works has specifically taken up the postmodernist postulates against which the research is conducted. Some of the research gaps observed are as follows:

1. A gap that the thesis focuses on is the absence of analysis of the emergence of female subjects in Hindi films from the angle of the theories of Fredric Jameson including New Depthlessness, Emotional Schizophrenia, and Pastiche. The application of these specific theories is absent from the previous works.
2. The research also focuses on the emergence of New Woman in Hindi films analysed from the Foucauldian notions of Power and Sexuality. Almost negligible research has been conducted in this regard as the researcher could not locate any such work.
3. Another similar research gap that is observed is that almost no research has been conducted which focuses on the application of Judith Butler's notion of Gender Performativity to the analysis of the emergence of New Woman in Hindi films.
4. The current research intends to fill the gap whereby the focus of research is to investigate the socio-cultural forces on Hindi films. The research explicitly incorporates the impact of socio-cultural forces in select films.

5. The research also fills the gap which can be observed while investigating the portrayal of women characters in postmodern Hindi cinema. Indian postmodernity, aided by liberalisation caused fundamental changes to the society, women being a part of the larger social framework. The research specifically focuses on how women are affected by postmodern tendencies.
6. The application of Elaine Showalter's notion of Gynocriticism imparts the feministic grounding to the analysis of all the films. Showalter had emphasised on the need of feministic interpretation of texts, which the research attempts to do by way of performing feministic analysis of the films while attempting to fill the gap in the application of the notion of gynocriticism to the select films.



## Chapter 2

### **Power, Pleasure, and Persecution: The Story of Class and Gender Struggle in *Rudaali***

One of the most powerful indictments against the socio-economic and religious establishments of India, *Rudaali* (1993), is based on the most acclaimed short story of the same name by Mahasweta Devi. The film demonstrates how the economic exploitation and social oppression of the subalterns are committed in various ways; women being the most oppressed of the lot. The short story forms a basis for the film *Rudaali*, directed and written by Kalpana Lajmi, featuring Dimple Kapadia as the protagonist of the film.

*Rudaali*, filmed against the cultural and physical milieu of rural Rajasthan, revolves around the life of a poor, untouchable woman Sanichari. Sanichari's father dies soon after her birth and her mother abandons her while she was a child. Sanichari's husband works as a bonded labour for the landlords of the village. Her husband is a drunkard who hardly assists her in running the household. Sanichari through her meager earning takes care of her sick mother-in-law. She has a son whose responsibility also lies on the shoulders of Sanichari. As the story progresses, she loses both her mother in law and her husband. Her son abandons the house as he grows up. Bhikhni, the professional mourner, becomes her friend and confidant. It is only after Bhikhni's death that Sanichari comes to know about her relationship with Bhikhni. Bhikhni was her mother who had abandoned her after birth. After knowing about the reality of her life, she cries for the first time, drawing upon her personal tragedy.

Kalpana Lajmi (1954-2018) was a social critic who produced, directed, and wrote screenplays of films dealing with relevant issues, particularly those concerning women. Having born into the family of creative minds, Lajmi was the daughter of the famous painter Lalita Lajmi. She received her inclination towards film making from Guru Dutt, an iconic filmmaker, who was Lajmi's uncle. Lajmi was an independent filmmaker who usually made a low budget, realistic films for production. She often chose the themes where women were in the centre of the debate. Her foray into the filmmaking came when she worked as an assistant director in *Bhumika: The Role*

(1977), directed by Shyam Benegal. Lajmi directed her first film, *DG Movie Pioneer*, a documentary film in 1978.

*Ek Pal* (1986) starring Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, and Farooq Sheikh was her debut movie as a feature film director. She performed multiple roles for the movie as she not only directed the movie but also produced and did screenplay writing. The movie revolves around the intricacies of conjugal life.

Lajmi was a versatile personality who not only delved into film making but also tried her hands at television production and direction and directed her first serial *Lohit Kinare* (1988). In 1993, she directed critically acclaimed and commercially successful film *Rudaali* starring Dimple Kapadia. The movie fetched Dimple Kapadia National Award for the Best Actress and also brought laurels to Lajmi for her directorial venture. *Darmiyaan: In Between*, released in 1997 was both produced and directed by her. Starring Tabu and Arif Zakaria, *Darmiyaan* narrates the tale of a struggling actress Zeenat who is trying to retain her foothold in the film industry and also struggling to get her transgender son Immi a respectable place in the society. The story starts with dancing and singing of a popular film star whose glory is fading with the passage of time in the ever-competitive glamour world of cinema. She is an admired actor and the primary breadwinner for the family, but the glitz and glamour are slipping out of her hands. On the other hand, Immi is struggling with the identity of being born as a transgender, acutely pulled apart by the standards of a society that only recognises the binaries of gender.

Lajmi's film *Daman: A Victim of Marital Rape* (2001) was a highly critically acclaimed film, narrating the story of a rape victim. Raveena Tandon, the main lead, won National Award for the Best Actress for the film. Tandon was the second actress who received the prestigious award while working for Lajmi. She had never received such critical appreciation for her acting skills as she did for this one. True to Lajmi's preference for the subject, *Daman* narrates the harrowing tale of the silent sufferers in the institution of marriage. The protagonist of the story, Durga, is married to a man of excessive volatile temperament. The film focuses on the turmoil through which the married life of Durga undergoes.

Though the narrative style and cinematography did not garner that much appreciation, Lajmi does not digress from her agenda of bringing forth the issues

concerning women. The film culminates in the metamorphoses of the protagonist from meek, docile, and submissive girl transformed into the persona of a goddess. While being asked why she concentrated on women-centric films, Lajmi replied:

Strange! I have never been consciously feminist. I am more a humanist. I like dealing with the situation of the underdog and, somehow, I feel women are such a minority in this country. Also, I feel if my voice can be heard, why shouldn't I highlight their situation and create awareness and hope? I'm not consciously making women-oriented films. Maybe, subconsciously, the feminist inside me veers towards highlighting women's issues. (Lajmi)

*Kyon*, released in 2003, revolves around the life of a few college students. Issues concerning friendship and other youth-related subjects form the narrative of the film. Another prominent film of Lajmi *Chingaari: A Spark of Revolution* exhibits the exploitative system built around the religious rituals.

Kalpana Lajmi was a lifelong partner of renowned Assamese legend Bhupen Hazarika, who was 40 when 17 years old Lajmi fell in love with him. Lajmi spent her entire life with him amid controversies, took great care of him with loyalty until he passed away on 5 Nov. 2011. Lajmi wrote and dedicated a book to Hazarika, *Bhupen Hazarika: As I Knew Him* (2018), published by HarperCollins India. Speaking on her relationship with Hazarika she said in an interview “He proposed to me too but I refused him saying, ‘I cannot accept your supposed love, which should have come to me when I was 35.’ When I was young, he was not interested” (Lajmi). Lajmi was diagnosed with kidney cancer and passed away on 23 Sept. 2018.

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) on whose short story of the same name the film *Rudaali* is based was an iconic Bengali fiction writer and a social activist. She authored several works including *Hajar Churashir Maa*, *Rudali*, and *Aranyer Adhikar*. Devi was a lifelong communist and worked for the rights and empowerment of the downtrodden and tribal people of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh states of India.

She was accorded with several literary awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award (in Bengali), Janapith Award, and Ramon Magsaysay Award along with the highest Indian civilian awards like Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan. Anjum Katyal,

writing about Mahasweta Devi comments, “Her powerful haunting tales of exploitation and struggle have been seen as rich sites of feminist discourse by scholars. Her innovative use of language has expanded the conversation borders of Bengali literature. She stands at the intersection of the vital contemporary question of politics, gender, and class” (45). *Rudaali* draws on the two strains of filmmaking in India, combining the social concerns of the ‘art cinema’ with the mass appeal of the commercial Hindi film. It thus tries to be work that is extremely political yet tries to reach out to the masses

The theme of survival is nowhere dealt with such profound insight from the angle of power structures as *Rudaali*. The struggle for survival is the focal point of the movie. *Rudaali* narrates the story of a *Dalit* woman who lives in the desert region of the state of Rajasthan in Northwest India. The narration which unfolds through a series of flashbacks narrates the story of her condemnation since birth. She was supposedly born at an inauspicious time and became a widow at a tender age. Her brief and marginally voluntary involvement with a feudal lord who remains infatuated with her all his life, her son who deserts her, and her only confidant and the only person whom she has found any solace with, dies of cholera, are the key events of the film. The locale of the film, Thahad, is the typical rural sight of any Indian village where different forces are present to browbeat downtrodden communities in numerous ways. Like almost all the Indian villages, Thahad is also plagued by the vices of system and feudalism. Caste is the central motif of the story and a determining factor of the lives of the people of Thahad. Sanichari, the central character of the film, belongs to the marginalised community of untouchables. Ganju community and Dushad community formed the majority in Thahad village. Sanichari came from the Ganju community, and like most from her community, lived in abject poverty. This well defined socio-economic categorisation brings home the idea that her pitiable condition is due to her belonging to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Her identity is inextricably entwined with her caste identity.

*Rudaali* means ‘one who cries’, refers to women who are hired to mourn at the death of wealthy people. The film is broadly woven around an event; the impending death of Thakur Ram Avtar Singh, the reigning feudal lord of a village. Ram Avtar is apprehensive of the likelihood that no one will mourn at his death so he asks for

*rudaali* to be brought in. A famous *rudaali* Bhikhni is called for the job, and she stays with Sanichari while awaiting Ram Avatar's death. While doing so, Sanichari recounts her life to Bhikhni, in the context of which, incidents of female camaraderie emerge.

As the story of her life unfolds, it is revealed that Sanichari is ostracised from birth. Having born on Shanichar (Saturday), considered to be inauspicious, the notion of being inauspicious got permanently etched on her identity. Her father died on the day she was born and she had to bear the taunt of being a father eater all her life. "Ill bearing Sanichari, you killed your father as soon as you were born" ("*Rudaali*" 00:05:40). Aggravating her misfortune, her mother ran away with a touring dancing troupe, leaving her to the mercy of fate.

Tragedy struck her life again when she was married to a drunkard lout who died of plague soon after their marriage. Overpowered by excessive poverty, Sanichari finds herself to be unable to pay for the last rites of her husband. For the purpose, she borrows money from the village moneylender Ram Avatar. Making her son a bonded labour to the Thakur was the only means she had to pay back the debt. Fate seemed to smile at her when the younger brother of the Thakur, Lakshman Singh; an urbane, city-bred, and educated man got infatuated with her. She also found herself attracted to him. However, after a momentary and passionate physical encounter, she rejects his advancements. The reason for the further liaison with him is left ambiguous. By getting this intimacy with Lakshman Singh, perhaps she is fulfilling her own desire to negate the restriction which society puts on female sexuality. The multiple reasons for her rejection could be that she did not want to jeopardise the future of her son or perhaps that she feels a sense of inferiority for belonging to her caste. Another reason could be that she does not want to be labelled as a kept woman and invite further degradation and disrespect in her life.

It is just not poverty, drought, starvation, and the hunger that Sanichari has to deal with; rather as the larger structures of oppression, caste, class, and feudalism intersect, Sanichari falls into the category of most oppressed in any permutation. Sanichari attends to her sick mother in law and her young son. Her son leaves her alone as he grows up and gets married. Sanichari's mother in law also passes away. Sanichari is all alone in the entire world until Bhikhni, who is a professional mourner,

appears in her life. As Sanichari tells her woeful tale, both the women develop a warm and powerful bond between them. After a lifetime of suffering, they find in each other soul mates that will help each other mitigate the pain, suffering, and loneliness of years. Just when Bhikhni was about to confide the story of her life to Sanichari, she is called away. At this juncture, Sanichari goes to meet Lakshman Singh, who has decided to leave for the city after his brother has passed away. She then gets the news that Bhikhni has suddenly died. The last message Bhikhni leaves for Sanichari reveals to Sanichari that Bhikhni was her mother who had deserted her right after her birth. Sanichari had always kept her emotions to herself, but this news shakes the very foundation of her being. Sanichari cries vehemently for the first time ever in her life.

Kalpana Lajmi's treatment of *Rudaali* is not in the same league as the original story authored by Mahasweta Devi. The film also varies in theme from the play adaptation done by Usha Ganguly. Devi states that her story is not a narrative about gender problems and treats it more like a story of caste and class struggle. As per Devi's opinion, *Rudaali* is a tale that goes beyond the focus on gender. It is about their struggle with the system and confrontation with the custodians of the power (Katyal 20-21). In the play adaptation of the novella, prominence is given to the representation of feministic streaks and the issue of class and cast are subsidiary. "I strongly believe that *Rudaali* is a women's text. I believe that the Indian woman, whether it's Sanichari or someone from the middle or upper class, is highly exploited in our society. Somehow, in *Rudaali*, I see Sanichari protesting against society on a whole" (36).

Michel Foucault (1926-84) in his *The History of Sexuality-I* states that:

The purpose of the present study is, in fact, to show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body - to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures; far from the body having to be effaced, what is needed is to make it visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another ... but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power that take life as their objective. Hence I do not envisage a history of mentalities. (37)

Although Foucault occasionally highlights the gender issues in his works, his analysis of Gender, Sexuality, Power, and Body, has given momentum to much feminist debate on the issue. He believes that both body and sexuality are constructed culturally, rather than being an inherent biological or natural phenomenon. Feminists have been greatly influenced by his theories, yet, Foucault himself never showed much inclination towards gender studies or feminism. For someone whose primary objective has been to explore how subjectivity is produced by power, and how power plays through the body; his observations are surprisingly gender-neutral to a large extent. Foucault has been immensely criticised for failing to address or even recognise the role of gender in the play of power. He has been accused of “glossing over the gender configuration of power” (Diamond and Quinby 45); of “neglect(ing) to examine the gendered character of many disciplinary techniques” (McNay 11), and of “treat(ing) the body throughout as if it was one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationships to the characteristic institutions of modern life” (Bartky 63).

In 1978, Foucault came up with the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, offering a highly innovative and original theory on how ‘abnormal’ behaviours are analysed through the analysis of masturbating child, homosexuals, and the madwoman. *History of Sexuality*, rose to be an iconic book, giving an insight into the behaviours which were earlier considered to be peculiar and treated to be the specimens for research about psychiatry/ sexology by the early modern scientists. These conditions were put under scientific research and analysed with detailed lists of photographs, symptoms, and methods of intervention. This categorisation of certain behaviours not only isolated and intensified diagnosis and often cruel treatment of these behaviours but also acted as a source of pleasure, identification, and emotional & political investment.

The commonality which both Foucault’s analysis and feminist politics shared was the libratory radicalism of the 1960s and 70s. Feminist critics, as well as Foucault, were critical of the way in which the bodies of gays, women, and children were termed to be pathological and needing scientific inquiry by experts in the field of science and medicine, inducing a sense of shame and mystery for the subjects under investigation. While feminists have found Foucault’s theories about body

enlightening, they also highlight its limitations. Their ways digressed in their interpretation of the concept of emancipation. *The Boston Women's Health Collective* (1973) declared a “more whole, more self-confident, and stronger femininity” (3). On the contrary, Foucault was suspicious of any such attempt to create a ‘more whole identity’, fearing such a project would create a dogma about ‘true self’, which classifies certain behaviours and dispositions as true, absolute, and normal, while others as false, wrong, and immoral (Sawicki 73).

Foucault was not essentially concerned with assessing how power is manipulated to produce or train gendered bodies. He was also oblivious of the notion that gender exercises an instrumental influence in determining the techniques and methods exerted on the body. In this regard Sandra Lee Bartky states:

Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the docile bodies’ of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of an embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. (63)

It has always been a matter of debate on how Foucault can discuss sexuality, body, politics, and power without discussing gender. He is not reluctant to use the female body to exemplify his idea of discipline. But surprisingly the female body as a gendered body does not find a place in his analysis. Though this stance of Foucault deeply problematizes feminists, it does not negate his entire conceptual framework. Rather it is a lacuna that demands to be filled. For the feminists as well as for Foucault, the body is an overdetermined site of power. It acts as a surface inscribed with historical and cultural practices and has been a subject for scrutiny to political and economic forces. The primary concern of the feminist critics has been to interrogate the factors causing the subjugation of female bodies, and how sexist reasoning and discrimination are allocated a valid passage through the perceived biological differences between males and females. Such differences have been authenticated by the dualistic paradigms propagated by the Western thought across the time. Aristotle regarded the female as ‘being afflicted with natural defectiveness’, ‘imperfect men’ was how St. Thomas Aquinas saw women (de Beauvoir 16). Women have been measured and judged against the norm of man, the essential human subject,



‘the strong active and moral half of the human whole (Bailey 99). Deviation in the biological context from the male standards makes women biologically (hence, ‘naturally’) inferior. She has been labelled to be ‘victims of pathological physiology’ (Balsamo 42).

In *Rudaali*, Sanichari is an embodiment of all that a poor woman in such social circumstances can be. She is a *Dalit*, a woman, and poor. She, or other women of her ilk, are the most vulnerable targets of any sexual and bodily onslaught. They are at the receiving end of gaze. Sanichari, belonging to the socially outcast untouchables is easy prey to the voyeuristic gaze. The *zamindars*: rich, affluent, and influential class assume her to be easily available for any sexual advancements and her resistance to such advancements is not taken in without reluctance. Both Lala and Pandit lure after Sanichari. These are the men who are at the peak of social and economic hierarchies, yet, are devoid of any moral or ethical standards. Lakshman Singh also takes interest in her, though her relationship with Lakshman Singh is not perceptible. The bond that they shared was more consensual than imposed, but her dislike of the other two is quite apparent. Lajmi resists the unambiguous use of the camera to depict the probing gaze of the males. Sanichari serves an object of desire and gaze for both Lala and Pandit, as well as for Lakshman Singh. Mulvey states that the camera technology and movement of the camera, aided by editing result in a variety of permutations of the scene (841). The use of the camera can be gendered, even if the camera is not as such a gendered object. Several female filmmakers opted to digress from the style of using the camera in a gendered way, focusing more on nurturing their own unique styles to exhibit their interpretations. Lajmi’s use of camera also does not advocate the superficial sexualisation of the body; rather it is more subtle and hinted at in *Rudaali*.

Sanichari is the prey to social hierarchy and phallogocentric patriarchy. The film is the portrayal of the desperate dilemma of Sanichari who represents the nexus between caste, phallocentrism, and feudalism. Lala’s advancements are entirely unwelcome, and despite her weak socio-economic condition, Sanichari does not take it upon her to be a mute victim to these advancements. She resists, absolutely not frightened of any repercussion that she might have to encounter. She is vocal, courageous, and undaunted. Sanichari does not take it to be her fate to be misbehaved

and disrespected and fights tooth and nail to be recognised as a respectable entity by the men around.

The human body, especially a female body, carries enormous cultural and social significance. The female body is the crucial point of reference and bedrock of cultural and social hegemony, on which social parity is built. Social conventions configure female identity in relation to a diversity of signs of manifestation based on the bodies of females. As per Foucault, sexuality is an inborn quality of every individual as well as a cultural belief working within varied spheres of power. In the Indian context, the concept of body is significant, especially the woman's body, which is linked to diverse power paradigms.

In another scene, where Lala and Pandit are sipping tea, singing a local song in the shop, sitting a point higher than the lower rung Sanichari and her daughter in law, laughing and gaping at them, is a glaring instance in the narrative that foregrounds this 'natural' and 'rightful' subjugation of the body of these women by the affluent class. Both Lala and Pandit are the representatives of the rich and powerful community of money lenders and priests. When they approach Sanichari with ill-intensions, she rebukes them without any reluctance and reservation.

This outburst of Sanichari towards the end of the scene is a testimony to her undeterred spirit to stand for the right. If the psyches of these cultured elites are sincerely scanned, then they come to reveal their inherent lust, greed, and other debasing urges worse than Sanichari and other so-called untouchables. Sanichari is not willing to accept her subordinate position in the society, although, she is subjected to innumerable painstaking customs of male chauvinistic society. Her struggles, however, find a home within the very ideologies she is resisting. Sanichari's ambivalence towards abuse and towards the myths of her society characterises her throughout the film. She resists Lala, the accountant/secretary of the feudal lords, as a scrounging, abusive leech, yet she thinks of herself as inferior to the affiliates of the feudal household. She is, therefore, simultaneously critical of yet trapped within the prevailing discourses of her world. Also, in the mode the scenes are filmed, in the approach in which a range of shots are set up, the objective of conveying contentment in herself and the autoeroticism of her body mixes unnoticeably with elements of the

usual song and dance number in popular Indian movies, in which the female is openly presented as an entity of heterosexual male desire.

Sanichari's relationship with Lakshman Singh is ambiguous as there are strains of mutual interest, though no visible liaison. Lakshman is smitten by her youthfulness and beauty when he asks her for water. "You have sharp eyes, look so beautiful!!" ("*Rudaali*" 00:21:03). Another instance when he gets to exhibit his infatuation towards her.

Lakshman Singh: Look up towards me. You have started breathing so fast.

Sanichari: No, my lord. It is a sin.

Lakshman Singh: Oh, crazy girl! I have started liking you, since the day I have seen you." ("*Rudaali*" 00: 29:23)

When Lakshman Singh decides to leave for the town after his father's death, he has the last meeting with Sanichari. They both have grown relatively older by then. "You still have the same beautiful eyes — Brown like a desert" ("*Rudaali*" 01:24:29).

The character of Lakshman Singh has been politicised by Lajmi. Set in the pre-independence era, he is one of the few landlords who acknowledge the changing social equations ushered in by the freedom movement, which is a threat to their supremacy. Lakshman Singh is a sober version of his father and this twist in his character has paved the way for his association with Sanichari. He is on the crossroads where newer ideas are around the corner, but older ones are difficult to give up. On one side, he lectures about the need of class and caste equality but on the other side enjoys all the perks and privileges of being a *zamindar*. His ingrained wish to have control over Sanichari is indicative of his archaic mindset, demonstrating that he thinks he can own whichever 'object' he sets his eyes on.

Power has always acted as an elemental human motive and has significantly affected human action since the dawn of human civilization. Power can be defined as the capacity of powerful to impose their will on the powerless and subsequent inability of the powerless to resist that will. "Power is often seen as a possession—something which is held onto by those in power and which those who are powerless try to wrest from their control" (Mills 35). Traditionally, in monarchies and in dictatorial regimes, power is absolute, monolithic, and hierarchical. The movement of

power is exclusively based on top to bottom model, and generally perceived to be restrictive and oppressive.

However, the role of power in the modern regime has undergone a change. Power in the modern regime is a productive force, unlike earlier suppressive prohibitions. Power can also enable social action though it usually refers to a relationship of domination and resistance. Michel Foucault and other postmodernists argue about the general definition of power in its reformulation. The paradigms of power relations in every society have been an issue of keen interest by the social scientists, philosophers, political thinkers, and writers for a long time. Debates on power involve different interpretations, formations, conceptions, and applications regarding the conceptualisation of power and its legitimisation in modern society. As a central concept within western social theory, the academic study of power has been approached in many ways, generating diverse and valuable insights.

In the present context, the growing impact of post-structuralism and postmodernism has reignited the debate on the power again. Centrally, the challenge has been concerned with the understanding the structures of power not at the level of the formal structures of the state, or of the other clearly defined institutions. Now, the interest has shifted to the level of informal processes of everyday life: the neighbourhood, shopping, family, sitting in the classroom, excursions, etc. Foucault believes that power is not a centralised force; rather it rests with the institutions. Foucault, through almost all his works proposes the notion that the aptest place to notice the role power plays is by observing relations between society, individual, and societal institutions. He assesses the methodology through which these institutions exert their power on individuals and groups, and how latter attempt to undermine this assertion in order to retain their autonomy. Foucault opines that power is present in the patterns of the most ordinary interactions between people, the most taken for granted conversations, the layouts of rooms and shape of buildings, the conversation who will be at prefect of the school, is where it flourishes and reproduces itself. In the works such as *The History of Sexuality* (1978), *Power/Knowledge* (1980), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault analysed the effects of various social institutions on groups of people and the role that those people play in accepting or resisting those effects. He states:

Power must be analysed as something which circulates or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge" 98)

Power, as per this theory, has two features: 1. Power acts as per a system, an arrangement of interpersonal relations involving the entire society, rather than a linear connection between oppressors and oppressed; 2. Individuals are not just the object of power, but the locus of power where the power and resistance to it are exerted (Mills 35). Mark G.E. Kelly has further nuanced these features present in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). In his opinion, Foucault's power involves the following features: 1. The subjectless-ness of power, meaning that it is not directed by the will of any individual; 2. The relationality of power, power is formed by the relations between the people, as opposed to quantum possessed by people; 3. The decentred-ness of power meaning implying power is accumulated on a single individual or class; 4. The multidirectional of power, as it is believed that power not necessarily flows from more to the less powerful, rather "comes from the below" even if it is nevertheless "non-egalitarian"; 5. Power has a dynamic of its own, and it is strategic (37-38). In this context Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow state:

One must rather conduct an ascending analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been - and continue to be - invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (224)

Apart from these, other features of power can also be identified from Foucault's *History of Sexuality-I* : "Power is coextensive with resistance, it is productive- it causes positive effects-, and it is ubiquitous, i.e., it can be found in any type of relation between the members of the society, being a possibility condition for any relation" (142).

Foucault insists that those investigating power must refrain from posing the unanswerable question:

Who then has power and what has he in mind? What is the aim of someone who possesses power? Instead, it is a case of studying power at the point where its intention, if it has one, is completely invested in its real and effective practices. What is needed is a study of power in its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application...where it installs itself and produces real effects. (97)

Foucault in an interview with Gerard Raulet, published in the book *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings*, edited by L. Kritzman, says “I am not referring to Power with a capital P, dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration” (38).

Foucault’s notion of power stands in complete contrast to the Marxist notion of power, which views the power to be a form of repression or oppression. Foucault thinks that power cannot always be interpreted in relation to repression, which simply forces people to obey. He says power is “coextensive with resistance; productive, producing positive effects; ubiquitous, being found in every kind of relationship, as a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship” (Kelly 38). In the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault says that “Where there is power there is resistance” (45). It implies that relations between individuals cannot be always decoded in the form of a master-slave category, but such relations can be viewed as productive relations because they give way to resistance. Where there is no resistance, there would be an absence of power.

Foucault’s ideas of power find their germination from his idea of discourse, as it is delivered through discourse. Discourses accepted by the main body of society are hegemonic discourses. Therefore, the groups that promote these hegemonic discourses become hegemonic groups in society. These hegemonic discourses are gradually accepted as the Truth. The Truth is supposedly derived through knowledge

in modern societies. So Truth, Power, and Knowledge are directly linked. This idea became quite evident when Foucault wrote: “That power produces knowledge... that power and knowledge directly imply one another” (97), where there is no power without knowledge, and no knowledge can exist without power relations.

In the light of Foucault’s position, patriarchy produces knowledge/truth about ‘wifehood’, ‘motherhood’, ‘marriage’ ‘untouchables’ ‘privileged’ which has a normalising and regulatory function. The power /knowledge nexus implies that all knowledge about one's individuality and identity is the result of a specific regime of power, here, caste and patriarchy. Foucauldian power/knowledge principal is useful in deconstructing the sexist economy of exploitation/ domination that governs the women of such a society. The denigration of the female body leads to a series of denials structured around issues of power, history, and politics. For the marginalised, their exclusion and marginalisation are compounded by the politics of identity, nationalism, and historiography.

Vrinda Nabar puts it “In India, the discrimination against them (women) would be by large three-fold: sex-based (Stri Jati), caste-based (Jati) and class-based. To be cast as a woman in India is to live out this triple-layered existence” (50). The feminist consciousness the film brings out the heterogeneity of the woman question in relation to multiple subjectivities and contexts. They are definite intervention/resistance to women’s embodiment and are engaged in the areas of contestation like representation, society, and invisibility within the framework of Indian culture and aim at understanding particularly the gendered subalterns (tribal low caste women) but also the caste mechanism, while evoking different forms of resistance.

It is with this sense of fighting for the hardships of the underprivileged that Mahasweta Devi took to writing and its subsequent representation in the film *Rudaali*. For Devi, social activism and documenting the harsh realities in the form of fiction are inseparable. Every event in Sanichari’s life is interwoven with the exploitative system. Authority and resistance are the two sides of the same power equation, which are not predictable, static, and unchangeable. Power cannot exist without resistance. In order to resist hostile behaviour by women, the use of violence is a common phenomenon. Such women are denounced and the revenge is taken on the entire

society which they come from. Their efforts to release themselves are met with confrontation. The United Nations Declaration in 1993 acknowledges that women have to face aggression in one form or the other, hence leading miserable lives:

Sexual, psychological and physical violence occurring in the family and the general community including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state. (Garcia-Moreno 3)

Dr. Arya Aiyappan, in his analysis of caste in *Rudali* states:

In a socially segregated society, the position and the status enjoyed by women reflect the social order. Through the positioning of women and the role relationship they play, within the invisible yet potent boundaries of the family and society, they visibly evoke multifarious social relations. Their identities founded on gender roles in a Culturally-diverse and religiously plural India are very ambiguous. The hierarchies of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, and race impinge on the feminine identities to confer upon them a marginalised status, either directly or indirectly. Women's marginalised status bespeaks of their identity in connection with the social-political topographies controlled by the power. (74)

The novella by Mahasweta Devi, *Rudali* is a tale about the struggle of the people of the lowliest strata of masses existing in the state of denial. While the poor of the village are left to starve, it is the landlords who lead a lavish life out of their hard work. In the original text, Mahasweta Devi takes death to beautifully render this irony of life. Contrary to that, Lajmi's dealing with the story in her film is different to a large extent. As discussed earlier, Devi vehemently rejects the idea that her text could be exclusively attributed to be a feminist text. For her, debate on gender is incorporated into the discourse of class. She believes that it will be unwise to focus on former at the expense of the latter and cause 'denial of history,' as she sees it:



For you, it may be important that this story is written by a woman, another woman has adapted it into a play, and yet another adapted it into a film. But I think that a writer has written the story, a director has adapted it into a play and another directed the film. It is not very important to me whether it was done by a woman or not, I write as a writer, not as a woman. (Devi)

Anjum Katyal states that “Devi’s novella is a tale written by a writer, irrespective of gender; about people’s struggle and their confrontation with the system” (20-21). Lajmi, on the other hand, treats the film from a feministic perspective. There are numerous deviations from the original text while making the film, including the absence of Sanichari’s brother in law and his wife from the film. Also, the film does not throw light on her grandson. The novella depicts the death of Budhwa; while in the film, he runs away after his wife leaves him. In the film, Lakshman Singh is a decent and sober version of his father Ramavtar Singh, and though only superficially, projects himself to believe in the futility of class and caste demarcations. Also, the role of Dhatua is replaced by Bhikhni in the film.

In Devi’s novella, the women of the higher caste match their male counterparts in indulging in the obscene display of vanity, pomp, sham, and upholding their alleged class and caste supremacy. Like the males of their clan, they are also obsessed with detailed funeral ceremony as a display of affluence and authority. These women’s privileged position in the society is of no advantage to their lives and identities as they are mere puppets at the hands of the males of the clan. With regard to their individuality and self-worth, they are no less than Sanicharis, though they have an excess to the life of luxury and vanity. In the film, the primary theme of death and poverty remains as it is in the novella, but wrapped in the cloak of feminism. Sanichari’s husband wins her in a betting game, preferably because she was a woman. Sanichari’s husband conveniently escapes his responsibilities and drowns himself in liquor, but she has no such option or inclination. Yet, the novella, as well as its filmic and theatre adaptations, have a major common ground where women are forced to fall into prostitution in order to escape abject poverty as they have no other alternatives.

In both incarnations of '*Rudali*', it has been the women auteur who has wrought and then re-wrought this text which revolves around the life of a woman—the poor, low-caste Sanichari. Each version is mediated by the differing purpose and agenda of its respective author, resulting in strikingly different texts which have one feature in common—they are perceived as women-intensive projects and perceived as feminist texts. (Katyal 1)

Even after thousands of years of its inception and more than six decades of its abolishment, the issues based on untouchability, gender, religion, caste, and social exploitation are the crucial issue of concern for the Indian society. It is not uncommon to hear about the stories of how *Dalits* are punished for taking water from the village pond restricted for them, or how *panchayats* reprimand the couple who go for inter-caste marriages. How the life of cows is more valuable than humans, particularly *Dalits*, and how *Dalits* are punished if they dare to break the age-old religious and social codes. It is believed that the caste system was fundamentally a class system. As per this class system, it was assumed that a person could shift in between the castes when qualified to do so. However, gradually, this phenomenon converted to a permanent affiliation with a standard caste, and the scope of mobility within the castes became impossible. This led to the never-ending hegemony of superior castes. As per the classical Hindu scripture *Rig Veda*, the scholarly class of Brahmins formed the head of the body, the warrior clan of *Kshatriyas* symbolised the arms, the merchant class of *Vaishyas* formed the torso, and the untouchable *Shudras*, doing the lowliest of the jobs, constituted the feet. Various indications reveal that *Brahmins* exercised endogamy, idea of not marrying outside their castes. This resulted in their exclusivity as they broke the ties with the rest of the castes, becoming a caste unto themselves. Consequently, a social categorisation/delimitation of the castes resulted in the formation of the Other in society. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, a pioneer in raising the issues of caste-based subjugation, alleges that since endogamy was a way in Hindu society, having its origin in *Brahmin* caste, it was unconditionally imitated by all the other caste. Consequently, such castes also became endogamous (23).

The film has numerous instances where the people from the lower caste are treated worse than the animals. At the very onset of the film, Thakur Ramavtar calls

out to Kaalia in an abusive manner. *Dalits* in the village are frequently bombarded with curses and abuses by the people of the high castes: like *manhoos*, *kameene*, *nikamma*, *bhain ke tughm*, *teri maa ko chor le jaayein*, while *dalits* have to show their regard and accept their inferior place in front of the *zamindars*. They are bound to address the *zamindars* as *hukum*, *sarkaar*, *maalik*, and *thakur*. They are forbidden to raise their eyes in front of the *zamindars*.

The idea of imitation essentially stems from the idea of caste superiority. Every time the other castes seek to emulate the so-called upper castes, they are shunned. This resulted in the intensification of endogamy. Economical progress and advancement in technology have not been able to challenge the superiority of castes in the psyche of common people. The malady of untouchability is still prevalent in the vast section of the society, though the spread of education has lessened its impact to some extent. Caste of a community is still an instrumental facet in the formation of identity for that community. The women forming the major part of this caste dynamic are invariably the dual sufferers.

As in any other part of the world, here in this village Thahad as well, women have been subjugated and exploited lot. The situation becomes even worse by adding caste-based marginalisation to the gender-based subjugation. The fact is explicitly displayed when the mother-in-law of Sanichari dies for the want of food, water, and medicines.

Functioning along criss-cross lines of sexual category, religious faith, social order, traditions, and language; India is a land of myriad conventions and cultures. Tossed together, the uneven relation between these categories creates the identity of every individual in society. This identity interplays with the gender of an individual. Every social institution, including family, caste and kinship, education, labour, and the state have a common phenomenon of gender. Several studies have indicated that the oppression of *Dalit* women is undoubtedly amongst the worst forms of exploitation and subordination; as per the accepted and codified norms of the society. In the neo-colonial setup, the dichotomies of class, tribe, gender, and caste are the means to further exploit and oppress women. Subsequently, such women are devoid of their equitable place in the social framework. Such sort of subjugation has undeniably positioned the narrative of caste and an extension to the tradition of abuse

and domination. A variety of superstitions and religions help keep the structure of oppression in operation. Indian women never had the opportunity of being the determiners of their fate and have always been subjected to dynamic issues pertaining to political, economic, and historical factors that have regulated Indian society through history. Current belief systems and norms find their roots in the indisputable authority of the scriptures. Prominent historian Romila Thapar comments “Within the Indian subcontinent, there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to Cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights, and morals” (6).

It can safely be stated that perhaps nowhere in the world, any woman had to undergo all the divisions, partialities, and contrasts attached to being born as a woman and as well as a lower caste woman, as the *Dalit* women in India have to face. The moment these women (girls) are born, they are subjected to the intricate parameters of caste, class, region, and religion. Religious beliefs propound the dispensability of women and *Shudras*, while putting both the *Shudras* and the women on the same pedestal. It remains fathomable to speculate the problems of being born as a woman and as a *Shudra*. Specific roles have been set out by the *Dharamshastras*, roles that are naturally subservient and which do not give her a unique identity. Like anywhere else in the world, Indian women end up being the victims of misogynistic and subjugatory practices. The woman, who in this case is also an untouchable woman, is most vulnerable to the combination of oppression. She can be harassed not only by the men of the upper cast but by the men (and women) of her caste as well.

Sanichari emerges to be a specimen of the anguish of women of lower castes and a mode of enlightenment and debate on crucial concerns related to their struggle and exploitation. The low caste woman Sanichari is prey to social hierarchy and phallogocentric patriarchy. The movie wonderfully represents the desperate dilemma of Sanichari who represents the nexus between phallogocentrism, feudalism, and casteism of typical rural north Indian village Thahad. Dr. Ambedkar calls such places to be ditch of regionalism and the den of ignorance and parochialism (67). Creed, caste, and gender are indispensable components of Indian society; an undeniable reality of every Indian village.

Colours also play a significant role in the narrative of the film. The miserable condition and hopelessness of Sanichari is well reflected in the imagery of desert and arid region devoid of any bright colour, against the background of which the film is picturised. While in her youth, Sanichari adorns bright colours, and the playfulness of her youth is depicted in the bright colours of her dress. As she matures she prefers more sober colours. Her life starts fading as the colours in her dresses fade away. After her husband passes away, as per the custom, she is not allowed to wear bright colours.

Gender, in cinema, finds representation through varied modes including speech, act, sign, and diverse social characterisations (caste, ethnicity, community, sexuality, and relationships). In the film, the images highlight differences through various camera and sound techniques, like low-key lighting, being fully or partly veiled and being in shadow. In the film, while depicting the people from the low class, particularly women; this technique has been used to reflect their subordinate status. At some points, the sharp lighting focusing on these women underline their awful status. The background score, the haunting periodic rhythm, and the intermittent dance in the film are prominent emblems in the film to reflect the dispute. The ideology of gender is perpetuated through *mise-en-scène* (the arrangement of the scenery, props, etc. on the stage of a theatrical production or on the set of a film), images, the mode of portrayal, gestures, nature of the gaze, gender categorisation, expressions, clothing, and body language as well. Most of the women characters are bold, but the dark attire of Sanichari gives a sinister air to her tragic life.

Through the character of Sanichari, Lajmi portrays the inconceivable and poignant affliction. The agony and discrimination depicted in the film merely confirm the insensitivity of the caste patriarchy of the society. The lives of Sanichari and her band of the vast majority of women are subjugated and demeaned under the tyrannical circumstances, injustice, and hierarchical superiority. *Rudaali* boldly builds up her means of subsistence in an antagonistic system. She encounters a series of predicament after the death of her close relatives, including her husband. The talk between Sanichari and Somri regarding the invariable connection of happiness in life with the day in which one is born is an obvious indication that those belonging to Sanichari's class, caste, and gender have no hope of bright fate. She criticises Lala as

a blood-sucking, exploitative leech, yet she believes herself to be inferior to the members of the feudal household. She is both critical of, yet trapped within the dominant discourses of her world. Gender ideologies are settled between the various strata of society. Sanchari's pitiable existence and the paltry sum she is paid for her hard work is in the sharp disparity to the lavish life of the upper-class people in the village. Not only this, the class segregation is reflected through the differences visible in the clothing styles of Sanichari and her daughter-in-law Moongri on the one hand and much-pampered women of the *zamindar* households.

The film is scattered with instances of caste cruelty, hostility, exploitation, and, over-charging hegemony. Personal flaws and inadequacies do not matter in the face of caste equations. Even the death of the feudal lord is the occasion of demonstration of hegemony and caste privileges. Wailing over the death of the caste master is such a humiliating task that every *rudaali* has to perform. The lamentation does not involve any personal affiliations; rather it is for the dread of losing caste supremacy and distinctions. It is kind of a mutilated rape with the emotional domains of these women. Upper castes need *rudaalis* to wail over the corpse in the households of the masters. Such women get money, clothing, and food as a reward for the task. Bhikhni makes an attempt to convince Sanichari to become a *rudaali* as a means of dealing with grief. She advises Sanichari to mourn for those who have oppressed her, stating that grieving for those who caused one's grief helps to overcome pain and anger. Sanichari opposes this work in the beginning, but eventually, her material reality compels her to become one. Through widowhood and motherhood, they depend on the moneylenders, while they splurge huge amounts of money on death rituals, just to gain status and repute. These wailers have no illusion about greed, miserliness, or moral bankruptcy of their masters, but at the same time, they are forced to submit to their power.

Sanichari has a complete sense of this exploitation, but she is also quite aware of the need for survival; though being a woman, life is relatively more difficult for her. She is doubly subjugated and finds it difficult to escape the misery surrounding her life, whereby, ironically enough, she earns her livelihood through her subjugation. Consequently, a never-ending circle of exploitation is formed, having no escape route. The system seems to be a two-way system. This ritual is the commodification of the

grief for Maliks to showcase their power and position, as hiring *rudaalis* enhances their social status. On the other side of the picture, for the needy; pretentious weeping becomes a necessity. Sanichari, who cries at the death of the kin of Maliks, was unable to drop any tear at the death of her own kin. These low caste wailers and prostitutes are the formation of the caste lords, and they assume that minds/bodies/spirits of these women are their sole property.

Performance rituals are an integral part of the rustic life, and the initial performances set up the psychological framework for the film. Festivals, puppet shows, and rural fairs serve as an escape from the hardships of life. As creating one's own culture is also a form of resistance, so these escapes serve as points of resistance. The film opens with several women dancing on the checkered floor, looking like a chessboard, with phallic pillars in the background, creating an impression of the dancers being agents of their destiny as well as being victims of the system. Sanichari sometimes dances for pleasure depicting her free spirit that she is otherwise not permitted to express. Dancing in the first rain of the season shows her relationship with the forces of nature, becoming one with the universe. She feels positive and empowered, symbolically representing the notion of a woman being equivalent to nature, i.e., fertility, regeneration, and reproduction. Here, the way the scene is filmed, the manner in which the various shots are set up, the use of light are very crucial as these convey pleasure in herself, contrary to the typical song and dance sequence of a Hindi film where a woman is an object of heterosexual male desire.

Another scene where Bhikhni and Sanichari and other women of the village are singing and dancing around the bonfire to the folksongs functions in a similar way to simultaneously empower and objectify women. This is an added dimension of community, sisterhood. These dances are instances of both resistance to and escape from the dominating powers around as well as a visual treat for the spectators of a commercial film. Bhikhni fulfils her desire for a permanent home by cooking for Sanichari.

Bhikhni is very instrumental in the gradual empowerment of Sanichari. She instils a sense of self-worth in Sanichari and also trains Sanichari on how to forge fake tears at the death of wealthy landlords. It is towards the closing of the film, that a revelation dawns upon Sanichari of Bhikhni being her mother, who had abandoned

her in infancy. Listening to this fact, she feels as if the umbilical cord had severed for the first time. She eventually overcomes the pain of this split and becomes a *rudaali*. By the end of the film, she is shown to have taken up the Bhikhni's assertive mannerism. Mutual dependence, closeness, and companionship- these come through clearly, as does Sanichari's loneliness when Bhikhni departs. It is with the characteristically understated style that Lajmi handles the news of the death of Bhikhni, which, through its unemotional lack of emphasis, actually heightens the impact. Sanichari will not cry for Bhikhni, for tears are a rare commodity now, part of the commercial transaction. Sanichari's emotional loss is definitely deeper, but life must go on.

Tears in the film are not symbolic of the weakness of women. It is an understanding of who one is. Sanichari is advised by Bhikhni to cry in order to mock back at the people who have despised and wronged her. When Sanichari does cry at the demise of the *zamindar*, the water flowing from her eyes is not a mark of dissent but an acceptance of her own identity as a woman. Sanichari is Showalter's female who has learnt the art of writing her own tales and has discovered herself after the tragedy.

The film is an antithesis to the belief that women cry at the drop of a pin. Here, they do so, to express themselves as crying is the only mode of venting their emotions they know. Language serves as the means of structure and differentiation for every society. When perceived from a social angle, language imitates, signifies, and restructures the ethnic, class, gender, and caste interests. The kind of Hindi spoken in *Rudaali* exposes the invincible and supreme gradations in the village folk. "It is not in the context-less vacuum that a language is spoken in; rather it is used in a host of discourse contexts which are impregnated with the ideology of the social systems and institutions" (Simpson 6). The selection of diction, style, the type of communication used by Sanichari, and being used for her are the testament of the clear-cut class and caste demarcations present in the society. Delivered in a rusticised standard Hindi, the film's dialogues are meant to compensate for the Marwari dialect of the hinterland Rajasthan. Village folk, out of regard and fear, never address the landlord and his son by name, rather as *Hukum* or *Sarkar*.



The intensity of oppression and the display of resistance are evident throughout the film. Sanichari resists her oppression by refusing to be exploited by the *Brahmin* priest, by vocally complaining about the drinking habit of her husband and the nagging of her mother-in-law. When her mother-in-law passes away, she secretly cremates her body at night to avoid paying an exorbitant fee that she can not afford. However, it is within the very ideologies that she is resisting that her resistance finds a home. When the priest warns her that unless she performs the last rites of her husband and her mother-in-law in complete form, they will be doomed to eternal damnation, she gives up and places her son in bonded labour. *Rudaali* is about survival. The ending is a symbol of this major theme.

Eventually, Sanichari's lingering inhibitions are removed and she emerges as a confident, self-controlled, and empowered woman. By the end of the film, the custom of *rudaali* has been politicised; it becomes an instrument of empowerment and a tool of revenge. Here, the prime concern is to attempt an understanding of a lower caste woman's fight of being a woman as well as a *Dalits*. It is pertinent to understand how the oppressed reciprocate to the discriminatory human rights associated with their identity of being from a lower caste and inferior gender.

Lajmi, in *Rudaali*, narrates the story of a woman, who despite facing all the adversities, emerges as the writer of her own destiny. She makes brave attempts to neither conform to the societal constructions of the gender nor caste prejudices. She upholds her individuality and when she transforms into a *rudaali*, she does not do so to follow the beliefs of the traditional profession but as a mode to express her non-conformity for traditional rituals, and subjugation through her fake tears. She does not stay behind a veil, rather comes out and cries aloud.

*Rudaali* undoubtedly emerges as a feminist film in several ways. The film contains the journey of her survival in the face of adversities she encounters. The film represents Sanichari's metamorphosis from a frail, reliant, and subdued woman to one who is shrewd, empowered, and manipulative. The film evolves as a profound and multi-dimensional story where concerns of caste, gender, class, and economics come together to depict a woman who despite all the odds coming her way, eventually paves her way towards success with the support of her people. In the middle of numerous strands of oppression, the film propagates that an awakening of

consciousness and the spread of education is required to bring substantial changes to reverse the deep-rooted biases engraved in the psyche of people.

### Chapter 3

#### The Context of Performativity in *Maachis*

The current chapter analyses how the female main lead of the film *Maachis* (1995), Veeran, a mute witness and victim of the vicious conflicts happening around her, debunks the state of performativity in order to emerge as a New Woman; the controller and regulator of her destiny. It will be studied how gender is portrayed in Gulzar's *Maachis* and how the film's representation of gender can be seen in relation to Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance. It will be proved how the film, in light of Butler's theories, possesses a critique of the categories of gender, and how the concept of performativity can serve as resistance against the hetero-normative system of gender categorisation. In this chapter, the research will attempt to establish a theoretical groundwork for the textual analysis to come and present Butler's theory of gender performativity. Further, a brief introduction will be given to some of the theoretical schools and figures by which she has been influenced and inspired, and spend some time defining the concept of performativity. The chapter will also analyse how some of Gulzar's other prominent works have also been instrumental in attempting to discuss the role of gender, particularly female gender. The chapter will also focus on historical contextualisation of the events leading to the theme of the film, including Operation Blue Star and anti-Sikh riots. Eventually, Butler's idea of performativity will be applied to the film to bring forth the conclusion that in the postmodern debate, a woman like Veeran, who is subjugated at the hands of system and law, transgresses the normative gender boundaries in an attempt to find her rightful place; though at times through violent and unlawful means.

*Maachis* is an anguished elegy to the lost generation of Punjabis, who were betrayed by their own ruthless leaders at the state and national levels. Virender Kaur (Veeran) leads a peaceful life in her village, along with her elderly mother and brother Jassi. The Jassi is the best friend of Veeran's fiancé (Kirpal Singh), Pali. On a fateful day which turns the course of their lives, Jassi suddenly disappears after a routine police search. The family goes through difficult times with bureaucratic refutation and never-ending wait. When eventually he does return, he abandons his family, first to

seek help and then to take revenge. He ultimately joins a terrorist group. Gradually the family falls apart as Pali too joins the terrorist group to seek the answers. Veeran also joins him to meet a dreadful fate. Veeran's character turns out to be a moving testament of the generation of Punjabi women whose lives were shattered during the militancy.

Through her work on gender performativity, Judith Butler (b. 1956) has been widely acclaimed in feminist circles for deconstructing the presumed relationship between sex and gender. Especially, for its radical insights into the ways in which gender presumed to be a performative phenomenon that takes on the illusion of something permanent and stable through its reiteration over time:

Gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 137)

Butler, a prominent philosopher, is attributed to be one of the most challenging thinkers of contemporary times. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published in 1990, brought her into prominence. The book caused huge controversy by putting forward certain notions about philosophy and feminist theory. She authored *Bodies that Matter* (1993) in order to further explain upon the 'scandalous' ideas she had proposed in the previous book. Butler has in-depth reading and understanding of a comprehensive range of subjects including philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis; questioning the boundaries of traditional castigating thinking. Butler is also well recognised for perpetuating her views on socio-political discourse and debate. She has been very passionate, critical, and open about her engagements in and outside the academic world.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio on 24 Feb. 1956, Butler received her Jewish inheritance and was initiated into the religion by a Rabbi in a local synagogue at the age of fourteen. She studied at various prominent institutions including Yale University. At the Heidelberg University in 1979, Butler became a recipient of reputed a Fulbright scholarship. Ph.D. in philosophy was awarded to her by Yale University in 1984. Her academic and intellectual orientation was towards

Phenomenology, German philosophy, and Frankfurt school. Post her Ph.D., she turned towards post-structuralism, to which she made noteworthy contribution.

Butler has taught at several institutions including Wesleyan University, John Hopkins University, George Washington University, Columbia University, and in 1978 she was appointed as a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Her prominent works include *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997), *Undoing Gender* (2004), *Prearious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004), *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009). She authored her *Senses of the Subject* in 2015 followed by her iconic book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* in 2015, including various other writings.

The most influential book by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, can be read as a site for interpreting feminism. The book unmoors the feminism at its basis, and questions the unity of experience of women. She maintained that feminism is collaborated with enforced heterosexuality, as it is the un-reflected condition of a dual-coded system based out of gender and desire.

The book takes up the issue of prohibition in a novel way. The text analyses the aggression practised in categorising the act of naming 'women' and 'men'. This imposition is specifically felt by those who cannot or do not want to fall into either category. Butler troubled the perpetual fixity of this categorisation by pointing out that the 'naturalness' of the female and male-sexed bodies are, in fact, the act of repeated, culturally contested performative acts and open to contestation. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler emphasises on the need for redefining the most basic categories of human identity in order to reinvent society. She also propounds sceptical questions about sex, gender, and sexuality; terms empowered enough to define people's identities. She questions why people are labelled as gay, straight, or even man or woman. She also muses over the source of these categories. Moreover, she wonders how these categories contribute to prejudice in society and how can questioning these categories help change society.

If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it always already gendered, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 145)

In Butler’s opinion, postulations about what is ‘normal’ put ‘non-normal’ people in an inferior position about having a less fulfilling life. With the customary identities based on gender, it is perceived as normal for men to behave in an alleged ‘masculine’ way and women to behave in a ‘womanly’ way. Anything that goes against this established notion is viewed with scepticism. While ‘homosexuality’ is commonly accepted in law, yet it is abhorred by society. ‘Heterosexuality’ is the standard norm and this belief leaves other sexualities to be labelled as ‘abnormal.’ Butler argues:

That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysics, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped—as if it could be. If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the Cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?” (122)

Over the years, over 1,00,000 copies of *Gender Trouble* have been sold, published in thirteen languages. The book is almost unanimously considered to be the ultimate iconic testament dealing in the history of gender studies, having a wide impact on a broad range of disciplines. *Gender Trouble*, popularly considered as the elemental text of ‘Queer theory,’ has also become a point of reference for the theory of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. The book is also a key work in the area of philosophy and literary criticism.

Briefly focusing on the other major works of Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (1993) maintains that power operates to constrain sex from the start, delimiting what counts for viable sex. Conceived as a regulatory norm, sex is appropriated through a set of practices. In the book, Butler offers a clarification of the notion of

performativity introduced in *Gender Trouble*. Butler's explanation in *Bodies That Matter* states:

For sure bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these “facts,” one might sceptically say, cannot be dismissed as mere construction, but their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means. Moreover, why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and dispensable character? (xi)

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler borrows conceptual and theoretical frameworks from *Gender Trouble* but situates a critique of the production of gender within a materially based understanding of the complex relationship between social transformation and survival. While *Gender Trouble* primarily treats gender as an act of *doing*, in *Undoing Gender*, Butler focuses on the act of *undoing* or unperforming traditional modes of gender and sexuality. Atticus Schcoch Zavaletta, in the review of the book, writes:

In her most recent work, Judith Butler asks how we can undo the restrictive norms of gender and sexuality and considers the various ways in which we are all undone —by grief, gender, desire, and the Other. Butler maintains that norms are necessary and yet must be exceeded in the name of the future of the human. (152)

Throughout the book, Butler stresses that this act of undoing is not strictly negative or positive rather produced due to paradoxical tension between socially orchestrated survival and individual will. She maintains that one's gender is not authored by that particular individual, as its terms are always negotiated within collective social contexts. In this regard, Erin Gray states:

In examining how bodies are normalized and made “human,” Butler explicitly concerns herself with the question of autonomy. Choosing one's own body means navigating among norms, and individual agency is bound up with societal critique and social transformation. One's personal gender is determined to the extent that social norms support and enable acts of claiming. (112)

In the review of Butler's most recent work *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Hana Worthen opines that "The book turns to the corporeal materiality of resistant subjectivity, of the body and of assembled bodies" (31). The book emerges to be imbibing the most explicit attempts of Butler at bringing together a number of themes from her previous works including performativity, gender politics, gender, language, and the body feature in the book. The book essentially functions as a window to her works, as well as developing on our understanding of various complex issues. While reviewing the book, Alexis Bushnell states, "*Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* is a 219-page intellectual inquiry of trying to understand the role of the body. The book questions the role and aspects of public assembly, performative space, and the performing body" (Bushnell). Worthen analyses the book as "Butler's 'Notes' not only signifies from the intersection of feminist political phenomenology with a theory of resistance but also fashions a radical democracy emphatically" (Worthen).

Butler, although has done some revolutionary and stimulating work in the field of gender studies, yet is criticised for overlooking the worldly aspects of the female body. Some of the critics accuse Butler of being too obscure and ponderous. Martha Nussbaum, in her much-accoladed article *The Professor of Parody*, holds Butler of not considering 'divergent interpretations' (3). She advances 'contestable interpretations' (3), and her 'writing cannot be explained in the usual way' (3). Her work is 'not directed at a non-academic audience eager to grapple with actual injustices' (3). She quotes:

Why does Butler prefer to write in this teasing, exasperating way? The style is certainly not unprecedented. Some precincts of the continental philosophical tradition, though surely not all of them, have an unfortunate tendency to regard the philosopher as a star who fascinates, and frequently by obscurity, rather than as an arguer among equals. (5)

Alex Hughes and Anne Witz in their article *Feminism and the Matter of Bodies: From de Beauvoir to Butler* examined the sex/ gender and its relationship to a fundamental third term 'the body'. They maintain (among other things) that whereas de' Beauvoir privileges gender and elides the body, Butler privileges gender over the body. They



argue that Butler's work is contributing to the general erosion and 'disappearance'(47) of gender as a category of analysis because she allows the body to 'represent more than residual facticity'(57). Mary Walsh states that Butler's work is having an 'enormous political impact upon contemporary feminist understandings of bodily subjectivity' (30). In the past decade or so, her gender performativity position has been 'used to castigate feminists of sexual difference' for their supposed ontological naivety' (32).

Moya Lloyd opines that traditionally speaking, female bodies have always been a site of analysing domination, hostility, objectification, and issues related to motherhood/ reproductivity. It has also served as an indicator of the sexual and biological differences among the genders. Butler's notion that one's gender is primarily constructed by the socio-cultural forces and not bound to one's sex finds opposition from other feminist theorists who opined that negating the role of the female sex and the body equates to undermining the lived experiences and subjectivity of females. They opine that women are bodies, and not merely a matter of discourse (123). Lloyd further states that psychoanalytical element finds no place or relevance in Butler's work, particularly with regard to agency and how individuals may figure out a mode for interpreting and shaping their identities (135).

However, there is no denying the fact that Butler is one of the most critical and relevant theorists of the present class of feminist philosophers. Sara Salih states that most of the contemporary theories of the present times including, but not restricted to, domains like Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction, and Feminism find mention in Butler's philosophy. Unsurprisingly, her contribution to the theory of gender identity, queer premise, and the feminist theory is attributed to be among some of the most sophisticated and relevant areas pertaining to feminist theory and socio-political studies in the twentieth century (Lloyd 56). Butler, by and large, was influenced by Foucault's notion of discipline and 'regulatory power,' and her stance on identity, gender, and performativity focuses on how the language gets empowered helping to contour one's behaviour and social position, with the help of repetitive performances.

Butler's stance on subject-hood and identity differentiates a lot from the customary ideas of agentic growth of individual and attainment. She prioritises the notion of individuality as the execution of a recurring set of acts that humans of both

the sexes express “in agentic but constrained terms” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 57). Butler opines that gender is the “cultural meaning that a sexed body assumes” (61); moulded by a variety of factors including cultural traditions, language, norms, and laws that we imbibe and tend to repeat over time. Butler is quoted as stating that performance of the gender norms, actions, costumes, and conduct is presumed to be obligatory if an individual is to “count and persist as a credible gendered subject” (Lloyd 64). Thus, evidently, we are forced to act out assigned gender in order to be relevant in society. Butler states that identity is a relative performance that is fluid, and thus likely to undergo changes. Butler emphasizes that “performativity is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 13).

Butler believes that gender is not autonomous and is massively ‘appointed’ as we all act out our gender. The status and necessity of gender are sustained by leading discourses, and norms of social conduct perpetuated and reinforced by society, family, modes of mass media, ingrained ideology, and social connections. Consequently, it is apt to state that internalization of gender roles is knowingly or unknowingly transferred by the leading discourses of the time. As a result, every individual, in order to fit into the assigned position, acts out or ‘performs’ their apt roles which are accepted socially. But at the same time, Butler also emphasizes that these norms are not the fixed entity and subject to change with the change in cultural patterns and roles. At times due to the pressure of such structures, individuals tend to suppress their real desires and aspirations.

Another notion that Butler puts forwards in relation to gender roles is that gender, unlike sex, is primarily a phenomenon which has its basis in the social and cultural construct, prioritizing masculine and heterosexual hierarchy over other modes of conduct. There are several factors that determine the ‘efficiency’ and precision with which women can perform their roles, including patriarchy, rigid cultural forces, and the neglect of women’s emotional and psychological needs. Women succumb to the prevailing discourse about what defines an adequate or comprehensible subject. Butler argues that the focus on categorization of males/females elicits guidelines about what is ‘normal’, causing an imbalance of power distribution among men and women. These demarcations prompt us to identify man as the standard, the power

centre, and the woman as the Other; meaningful only as long as analyzed in relation to the male-subject.

In *Maachis*, the idea of performativity has been dealt with at various levels. The character of Virender (Veeran, as shortly) performs her gender on a daily basis. The struggle that Veeran does to execute her gender most efficiently is vividly portrayed in the film. She is inherently a docile and submissive girl as she is expected to be in a patriarchal and heterosexual society. Right from doing the household chores to being a witness and victim of her brother's victimization at the hands of police are some of the instances that display that Veeran has reconciled to her subversive position in the society. Binary gender construction focuses on the pre-decided and gender-specific roles for men and women. Veeran perfectly and ideally fulfils the parameters of gender she is expected to play in the film. She is soft-spoken and almost mute in the film. It is only later towards the end of the film that her actions speak louder than her words, and she tears off her cloak of helplessness in order to be the master of her actions and fate, emerging as a New Woman. As stated earlier Butler believes that gender is not autonomous and is massively 'appointed' as we all act out our gender. The status and necessity of gender are sustained by leading discourses, and norms of social conduct perpetuated and reinforced by society, family, modes of mass media, ingrained ideology, and social relations. Veeran 'acts' her gender fully and devotedly, even at the cost of undermining her own ambitions and dreams.

Though Veeran is not the protagonist of the film in the orthodox interpretation of the term, as she is given comparatively less screen space, yet she is very instrumental in carrying forward the narration of the film. She mostly remains silent throughout the film, yet her muteness is very crucial when contradicted with the unusual path she chooses for herself eventually. For Veeran, her gender is a matter of choice, which she refused to act when she did not want to.

*Maachis* is directed by Sampooran Singh Kalra, popularly known by his pen name Gulzar, and produced by R.V. Pandit. Gulzar was born in 1934 in Jhelum city in colonised India (now in Pakistan). Gulzar started his career as a lyricist with RD Burman in the 1963 film *Bandini*. His films are termed to be one of the most important and philosophical contributions to the Hindi cinema. It was during the decades of the 1970s and 80s that parallel cinema emerged in the Hindi film horizon,

and Gulzar carved a niche for himself during those times. Gulzar's journey as a writer and director includes some of the finest and critically acclaimed films like *Mere Apne* (1970), *Parichay* (1972), *Koshish* (1972), *Khushboo* (1975), *Ijaazat* (1987), *Angoor* (1982), *Mausam* (1975), *Kinaara* (1977), *Kitaab* (1977), *Aandhi* (1975), *Lekin* (1990), *Maachis* (1996), and *Hu Tu Tu* (1999). Gulzar's films are termed to be the documents of human relationships and emotions. Gulzar is a master storyteller who documents the nuanced human conditions with extreme sensitivity and sincerity. Gulzar, a prominent writer and lyricist, always desired to be the author of literary texts, however, his films fall in the category where he is the *auteur* of his films. Gulzar has almost always succeeded in imparting a distinguishable feel and touch to his films. As a filmmaker, Gulzar is incredibly capable of reflecting his worldview through his films. Of all the films he has been associated with, only *Libaas* remains unreleased. Unlike most of the other filmmakers whose works lack depth and meaning, Gulzar's almost every film has a unique philosophical touch to it, while addressing the issues of day to day life. The characters of Gulzar's films are real and living entities, rather than fictional characters, disseminating wisdom through their tales. His songs are reservoirs of wisdom and compassion.

The intricacies of human relationships are to the forefront of his tales. He essentially understands and projects the complexities of love, longingness, nostalgia, friendship, separation, and the regret about missed opportunities. He concisely reflects the varied hues of human experiences in his lyrics and dialogues. He accepts that characters are not uni-dimensional and that they keep hurting the people they love, not finding the ways to amend their actions. His characters usually have an intense desire for the times gone by and they keep revisiting the past in order to make sense of the present. Gulzar recognizes the significance of flashbacks in the narrative and uses these quite appropriately and wisely. Almost all the films of Gulzar's shift back and forth in time, as characters keep on building and reshaping their personalities from the experiences they acquire through defeats and victories.

Hardly any filmmaker has depicted the poignancy of women characters in their films as Gulzar. He has mastered the art of etching these characters like, perhaps, no one else has. It is his master art that he draws these self-confident, dignified, and receptive women along with the twin virtues of being silent and articulate when

required. Veeran in *Maachis*, along with several other women of his films, have this common denominator that they are mostly silent, yet have a very strong presence in the narrative. The female lead of *Aandhi* (1975), Aarti, is stuck in the mid of her professional aspirations and her emotions towards JK. Aarti is manipulative, bright fervent, and passionate. She is completely unapologetic about her assertive opinions and preferences. Kajli from *Mausam* (1975) is a woman who holds a privileged position in society, yet, surprisingly she is untouched by her privileged position. *Khushboo's* (1975) Kusum, is also a self-sufficing character who does not seek any sanction or validity from the external domineering forces. She detests being taken for granted. Maya of *Ijaazat* (1987) is an imaginary character, existing only in the author's fancy, as such imaginary characters have no connection to the authentic world. Another character from the same movie, Sudha, is always ready to sacrifice herself for the happiness of the near and dear ones. Rewa from *Lekin* (1991) is travelling between her past and present. Panna from *Hu Tu Tu* (1999) is ready to kill her corrupt mother for the sake of the betterment of the country.

While reviewing *Echoes & Eloquences: The Life and Cinema of Gulzar*, by Saibal Chatterjee, Randeep Wadhera writes about the sensitive delineation of female characters by Gulzar:

Similarly, while analyzing his other movies like *Achanak*, *Angoor*, *Koshish*, *Khushboo*, *Kitaab*, *Kirdaar* and *Khamoshi*, he dwells upon the influence of the filmmaker's variegated experiences. The sensitive portrayal of women is traced back to the absence of a mother's love in his life. Again, Gulzar's movies deal intrinsically with relationships, wherein he rarely portrays female protagonists in dark shades. The attempt is more at understanding the female psyche than making value judgments. (Wadhera)

The influence of Bimal Roy and Hrishikesh Mukherjee is quite conspicuous in Gulzar's cinema. He debuted as an assistant director to Bimal Roy. Gulzar also worked with Hrishikesh Mukherjee in the capacity of both as an assistant and co-scriptwriter to several of his films. Gulzar collaborated with Asit Sen as well for several of his films. Some of the most iconic productions of the 1960s and 70s were written by Gulzar like *Khamoshi* (1969), *Guddi* (1971), *Anand* (1971), *Namak Haram*

(1973), and *Chupke Chupke* (1975), *Masoom* (1982) *New Delhi Times* (1986). Gulzar is renowned for his literary ventures as well. He translated good literature into cinema, making an adaptation of Shakespeare's play *Comedy of Errors* twice, first in *Do Dooni Char* (1969), and then as *Angoor* (1982). Sanjeev Kumar and Deven Verma executed some of the finest roles of their film career in Gulzar's films.

Gulzar has been instrumental in exploring the true caliber of some of the mainstream actors with his middle-of-the-road cinema. Some of the mainstream actors were deglamorized to be acknowledged as serious actors. One such actor Jeetendra, acted in three of Gulzar's films, *Parichay* released in 1972, *Khushboo* in 1979, and *Kinara* in 1979 during his heyday. Several others, including Hema Malini and Vinod Khanna, explored their talent in his films. But it was Sanjeev Kumar with whom Gulzar had the longest and most rewarding association. Films like *Koshish* (1972), *Angoor* (1982), *Aandhi* (1975), and *Namkeen* (1982) became classics because of Sanjeev Kumar's spontaneous and naturalist acting supported by the director's precision.

In *In the Company of a Poet* Nasreen Munni Kabir states:

Gulzar Saab's love for poetry is so evident that one just wants to read more of it – his and other poets' works as well. He speaks of how he got into movies, his experiences with Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Bimal Roy, and R.D. Burman and many more legends. He talks of how he has to play tennis every morning without fail and about his relationship with his daughter and grandson. For me reading this book was not just knowing about Gulzarji but also about the people connected to him and that felt just too good. He speaks of partition and his nightmares and that brought tears to my eyes. There are a lot of poems as well in the book, which only lends another voice. (112)

Gulzar was not only an extraordinary filmmaker but also a prominent poet who touched the inner chords of his listener's through his poignant lyrics. Bimal Roy asked him to join him as an assistant and he joined him. Gulzar wrote a bhajan for *Kabuliwala* (1961) *Ganga aaye kahaan se Ganga jaaye kahaan re* and a song for *Prem Patr* (1962). Gulzar gained attention with the popularity of a song *Humne dekhi hain in aankhon ki mehkati khushboo* from film *Khamoshi* (1969). In 1971 he wrote

songs for film *Guddi* (1971). *Hum ko man ki shakti dena* a prayer is still sung in many schools as a morning prayer. Gulzar as a lyricist worked with many noted music composers like Salil Chowdhary, Sachin Dev Burman, Shanker Jaikishen, Hemant Kumar, Madan Mohan, Lakshmikant Pyarelal, Rahul Dev Burman, Rajesh Roshan, Annu Malik, A.R.Rahman, Vishal Bhardwaj, and Shanker Ehsaan Loy.

While reviewing *In the Company of a Poet* on Gulzar by Nasreen Munni Kabir, *Dawn* writes:

In the Company of a Poet: Gulzar in Conversation with Nasreen Munni Kabir encapsulates the poet's views on movies and his association with titanic figures....the book also looks at Gulzar's childhood and family. Though born in an enlightened Sikh family, after being uprooted by Partition, Gulzar shaved off his beard and cut his hair short.

As his mother died before his first birthday, Gulzar was brought up by his step-mother. When still quite young, his father had taken him to Delhi from Dina, his birthplace, and Gulzar was only able to visit it again after seven decades.

His adopted name and his habit of mouthing InshaAllah time and again make Muslims assume he is one of them. His fluency in Bengali gave film-maker K. Asif the feeling that he was from Bengal until he heard him speak to his poet friend Sukhbir in chaste Punjabi. ("A Poet of All Seasons")

*Maachis* or the matchsticks symbolise fire. The film is centred over the youth of Punjab in the heyday of terrorism in post anti- Sikh riots in Punjab. Written and directed by Gulzar in 1996, *Maachis* is a film that revolves around the turbulence of the partition of 1947, anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and ensuing war for the demand of the Sikh separatist state. Although the concept of separate Sikh state emerged in the early twentieth century, it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that proponents of an independent Sikh state took up arms for the cause. The timing was due in part to the Indian Government's systematic mismanagements of Sikh political and ethnic concerns over successive decades (Tully et al.). Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, as his followers called him, was a charismatic leader who initially led the call for Khalistan. He began his career as the Head of Damdami Taksal, a teaching and

exegetical institution that claims a direct connection to Sikh tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh. This purported-but not perhaps entirely legitimate-connection to Guru Gobind Singh is important because he is strongly associated with Sikh martial history and consolidation of Sikh political power. Bhindranwale's association with this institution gave him substantial credibility as a pious Sikh religious and political authority. However, there were several other factors behind the rise of Bhindranwale's popularity. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of Congress party took him on her side in order to make an effort to cause split in the Akali Dal, the party in opposition. Subsequently, the time proved that this support was a huge miscalculation, as Bhindranwale with his growing popularity, particularly among rural masses, became more ambitious about his dream of a carving a separate Sikh state.

On Dec 15, 1983, Bhindranwale and several like-minded supporters (e.g., Members of the Babbar Khalsa) infiltrated into the Akal Takht, one of the most pious buildings of Golden Temple complex, so as to avoid arrest. Bhindranwale believed that the inviolability of the holy shrine would impart him some protection and expected that the state would hesitate to haul him out forcefully from the complex. He made comprehensive arrangements inside the complex; amassing arms, ammunition, and ration. Bhindranwale took over and subsequently occupied the Akal Takht, the holiest structure that signified Sikh spiritual and political authority. In June 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi issued orders to the army to enter into the temple complex so as to extract the militants.

Indian military carried out a military operation code-named Operation Blue Star between 1-8 June 1984 to remove militants from the Temple as Bhindranwale and his followers were evading arrest by taking up residence in Golden Temple (Singh 332). A major turn to the Sikh history occurred when on 1 June 1984, Indira Gandhi issued orders to the army to initiate the operation Blue Star, as any likelihood of successful negotiations with the militants diminished (Wolpert 117). The temple complex was surrounded on June 3, 1984. The army persuaded the militants through loudspeakers to surrender and ensure the safe eviction of the trapped pilgrims. The persuasion, however, did not materialise. The fighting started on June 5 and lasted for three days. Official documents stated to be the causality figures to be around 83 dead and 249 injured for the army ("Army reveals startling facts on Blue Star"). As per the



official estimates, approximately 1592 militants were arrested. Around 493 combined military and civil casualties were reported (“White Paper”). Unofficial casualty figures were higher as the pilgrims trapped in temple were used as human shields by the militants (Kiss 100). The military action on the Golden Temple caused worldwide furore and was criticised as an attack on the rights of the Sikh minority (David 1276). This action was followed by Operation Woodrose, the army’s ‘mopping up’ exercise that took place throughout Punjab in an effort to capture Bhindranwale’s activists and to clear all Gurudwaras in the state of militants.

Due to the large scale deaths and destruction to the holy place, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi started losing her credibility among Sikhs. Religious sensibilities of the Sikh community were hurt due to the loss of Sikh scriptures and manuscripts in the Sikh history museum. Also, the entry of soldiers to the Sanctum Sanctorum with boots was a sacrilege that deeply hurt the community. Trust in the government withered away and an environment of mistrust was created. Though the threat to the life of Mrs. Gandhi’s life increased manifold, yet she did not discharge her Sikh bodyguards from duty. She was apprehensive that such an act will further deteriorate the faith of the Sikh community in her. She also feared that her opponents will take political advantage by building her anti-Sikh image so she ordered the reinstatement of the Sikh bodyguards, including Beant Singh, who eventually turned out to be one of her assassins.

Bhindranwale perished in this operation, but the militancy was not crushed. Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on 31 Oct. 1984 at her residence in New Delhi (“1984: Indian Prime Minister Shot Dead”). Operation Blue Star had left a deep psychic wound on the minds of Sikhs, particularly youth who joined the Khalistan Movement at the behest of radical separatist leaders. Khalistan movement referred to a separatist movement where Sikhs of Punjab asked for a homeland for Sikhs (Kinnvall 45). The movement originally began by Jagjit Singh Chouhan, an expatriate leader in 1971. The assassination of Indira Gandhi led to wide-spread pogroms. It is widely alleged that the ruling party of the times Indian National Congress hatched a conspiracy against the Sikhs and was hand in gloves with the rioting mob, killing thousands of the minority community (Shaw 129). Several agencies estimated the death toll to be about 800- 1700, whilst government

estimate projects that about 2800 Sikhs were killed in the riots. Across the journalistic fraternity and human rights organisations, it was believed that the riots received the sanctity of the Congress government and officials. It was virtually unanimously believed that the perpetrators of the violence were able to go about their work for hours without hindrance. Factories, shops, and residences owned by Sikhs were selectively burnt down. Several reports cited the instances when the police either came to the scene late or refused to overlook the pleas for the help. Seemingly, in Delhi, the curfew did not seem to hinder the movements of assailants at all. While people of various political persuasions may have been involved in the writing, the most prominent role was undoubtedly by Congress (I) men, which also accounted for the administration being rendered ineffective (Kang 103).

Already heatedly debated the issue of dwindling Sikh rights in the country received an impetus after the anti-Sikh-riots and ensuing massacre. After the riots, the proponents of the homeland for Sikhs claimed that India could not take care of its Sikh community; hence a Sikh homeland was needed. Operation Blue Star and the following turn of events moved a section of Sikh diaspora to espouse this cause (Sharma 19). Though the Rajiv- Longowal accord was an effort to resolve the vexed political situation in Punjab, it proved to be an illusion, a lull before the storm. The Golden Temple again became the sanctuary of militant activities. The precincts of the Golden temple acted as the turf from where the public declaration of Khalistan was made on 26 Jan. 1986. Following developments like the division of Akali Dal, entry of the security forces into the Golden Temple complex, the launching of the so-called 'social-reform' movement by the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) and the dismissal of the Akali government in 1987 led to a gloomy state of affairs for the state and the dark clouds of a fear psychosis loomed large over the horizon of Punjab. Dominant political players engaged in political infighting and inept and unstable government provided an environment suitable for the growth of militants groups. The state witnessed a spurt in armed organisations, as the number increased to more than a dozen, along with several splinter groups including anti-social elements. The disturbed environment provided an opportunity for anti-social elements, mostly smugglers, outlaws, and petty criminals who joined these organizations to serve their

own vested interests (Dang 146). New leadership emerged in many of the organizations in such a volatile situation (Puri et al.).

It was during the years 1987-92 that militant activities increased manifold, which included killings, bomb blasts, ransom, extortion, bank robberies, smuggling, and kidnappings. The killings in the state multiplied along with other sufferings experienced by people (Dhillon 120-22). A study estimated that more than a billion rupees were extorted by the militants between 1987-92, making many terrorists, their relatives, and shelter providers into mini magnates (Wallace 78). The state witnessed a higher degree of violence obtained when there was a complete absence of even minor protests, particularly in rural areas. The primary reason was that the rural folk were afraid of becoming direct targets of militants if they participated in protest or resistance (Gill 37). The then governor of Punjab (1988-93), Siddhartha Shankar Ray is quoted stating the following words:

There is a Government in Punjab but it is not in Chandigarh. It is in Amritsar. Rooms No. 45, 47, 48 of Guru Nanak Niwas. Like the Jazhia of the Mughal day, the militants are sending show-cause notices to people demanding money. These people, both Sikhs and Hindus, do not go to the police or to D.C. They straight go to the militants, pay the money and go off. (Narayan 27)

Women, though not at the forefront of the affairs, were equally victimised. They were raped, abducted, their men killed as well as house and property destroyed. They were abducted and married off to militants mostly without their consent:

Manjit Kaur's is a typical case. On the night of June 23, 1992, a gang of terrorists swooped on her father Joginder Singh's secluded farmhouse in the Tarn Taran district and kidnapped her. For the next two weeks, she was subjected to sexual abuse by her abductors, a gang of terrorists belonging to the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF). Paralysed by fear of reprisals, her family dared not even inform the police of the girl's abduction. (Vinayak)

Such women had no one to turn to as both agencies and authorities usually failed them. They were the victims of dual-side subjugation as both forces (police & army) and militants were parties to atrocities inflicted upon them. In the utter lapse of any

corrective system and judiciary, it was very difficult for these women to hope for any fair judgment:

“I have lost my honour. What worries me now is that they will be out to get me.” The reason for her fear is that she is currently being interrogated by police for information about terrorist hideouts.

"She will be let off once our task is over," says a police officer. However, once she is out, she will be faced with the stigma of being known as a "dishonoured" girl. (Vinayak)

Once the ‘husbands’ from these forced marriages were killed, these women were left to fend for themselves, moving from hideout to hideout. If caught, they were subjected to an endless cycle of police interrogations and even led to a spell in jail. For the terrorists, the marriages were a convenient cover and protection against police scrutiny. The facade of normal life also provided them with certain legitimacy in the eyes of the community. However, the women were also used to aid their terrorist activities by being sent out as messengers. They were alleged to be in the intelligence wing of the terrorists, and this helps to explain the fact that hundreds of accomplices of the terrorists were killed in police encounters during the unrest times.

The abductions and consequently forced marriages served the dual purpose of satisfying the terrorists’ physical and social needs, but for the victims, these marriages were the deepest humiliation they could imagine. Such women used to be mentally so devastated that they usually suffered from hysteria. Some of the women helped the police identify terrorist hideouts. Police attributed many of their successes stemming from vital information given by the victimised women and their families. Focusing on the plight of women during militancy, Hundal states:

During militancy victimization of women took new strides. The exploitation and victimization ranged from harassment, beating, threatening to kidnap, rape, and killing. During the terrorist phase, there was no such thought of innocent civilians; all members of the society were legitimate targets. School going girls from their very stage of identification were forced to wear salwar-kameez and cover their heads with dupatta. They were restricted from wearing jeans, shirts, frocks, etc. Young women could not wear jewellery nor good

clothes. If they wore, they at that time had to face harassment from different sections of society. (5)

The real tragedy was that when the terrorists who abducted them were killed in the encounters with the police, these women had to face contempt of society and their family. Most of the emotionally-scarred victims were paralysed by an overwhelming sense of despair and helplessness. Their plight played a large part in turning public opinion in the countryside irreversibly against the terrorists. Initially, the sheer awe that the gun-toting militants inspired made many families decide to give their daughters in marriage to them. But with cases of frequent rapes and forced marriages came to light, the romanticised image of terrorists was destroyed. The terrorists were aware that their vicious assaults on women had alienated ordinary people in the countryside who might otherwise support them, but there was little they could do to limit the damage because even top militant leaders could not escape the blame.

Various theories and explanations are provided behind the decline of terrorism in Punjab. Prominent of these reasons was strengthening and modernisation of police and security forces to crush terrorism. At the beginning of the violence, security forces were ill-equipped to deal with violence in terms of their strength and weapons in regard to militants. The police force was recruited on a high scale and its strength rose to seventy thousand by 1993 from a mere thirty-five thousand in 1989. Every strategy and tactic was used by the police to crush militancy. They arrested thousands of people based even on the mere suspicion that they were either related to or supported the terrorists. The police were given a 'freehand' to tackle the situation. People were detained for a month, even without a trial. Inhumane torture tactics were used.

However, counter-violence by the state against militants resulted in the alienation of the people from mainstream politics; destabilised the state's social structures and produced many individual tragedies. The state emerged as the main source and perpetrator of violence, and the actions of the security forces were labelled as 'state terrorism' or a 'terrorist state' in contemporary India (Sekhon & Singh 58).

Every possible tactic and strategy was used by the police to crush militancy. Thousands of people were arrested based on mere suspicion. Stringent measures used by the forces were highly criticised. 17,529 cases of TADA were registered by the

police between 1985 and 1994. Such laws sanctioned extra-judicial kidnapping and killings known as ‘encounters’, custodial deaths, and alleged disappearances from police custody while coming from or going to the courts for trial. Staging fake encounters became the norm. Police personnels were promised handsome rewards such as a quick promotion for the apprehension/liquidation of dreaded militants (Puri et al. 118). The procedure included the first apprehension and then killing. Thousands suffered torture in custody, long periods of illegal detainment, and other forms of physical and psychological torment. Bodies of the killed were quietly disposed of. A larger chunk of people in these extra-judicial killings by forces belonged to border areas.

The common people entangled between the ‘Khalistani terrorism’ and state oppression were at the receiving end from both the quarters. Having suffered immensely, they realised that they would have to take action on their own to protect themselves and their families. Regard for so-called militants started diminishing, as people got fed up from daily violence and fear of being killed. The state and security forces were instrumental in bringing militancy down; at the same time, common masses played a key role as well. Supported by leftist parties and democratic forces, people mustered the courage to take on the terrorists and other communal forces. The roots of people’s resistance, both armed as well as unarmed, is generally traced to the late 1980s when the widespread but quiet resistance of that kind symbolised rejection of the militants and their ideology under a moral conviction. Apart from familial and individual resistance, there were numerous instances of rallies and demonstration organised by the political groups/parties (Puri et al.).

This is the backdrop from where Gulzar narrates the story of *Maachis*. The movie is a reflection of the times when militancy was at its peak in Punjab. It is through a series of flashbacks that *Maachis* tells the story of youth like Veeran who end up being terrorists. The film attempts to delineate apathetic and brutal administration, destabilised political situation, and injustice. The film also shows how the central characters Veeran (Tabu) and Pali (Chandrachur Singh); educated youth of Punjab are pushed into terrorism by these forces. Pali’s friendship with a turbaned Sikh man Jassi, brother of Veeran, is shattered when Jassi is tortured by the police in the aftermath of the attack at the Golden Temple by the Indira Gandhi government.

The attack is followed by brutal anti-insurgency policies imposed after Indira Gandhi's assassination. Shakuntala Banaji, in her analysis of the film comments:

[Jassi's]... suicide after being interrogated and tortured by the Indian police, has been called the 'anguish of the middle class', an 'embalming of the middle-class melancholia' and a transformation of the civil family into one of the weaponised masculinity. The manner in which the hero's concerns at an individual level, his subjectivity and that of his fiancée- his friend's sister, who also ends up becoming a terrorist is used, to blot out the social and political realities of insurgency, non-violent civil responses to it, as well as to state repression, and to shift the discourse around terrorism and state repression into a register where a greater degree of violence is normalised for the middle classes. (87)

Veeran is not the proverbial lead of the film who shoulders the film entirely on her own, yet she is a very crucial component of the narrative. A superficial view of the film convinces the viewer of her dispensability and her frequent appearance and disappearance from the storyline initially make one believe about the transience and temporality of her character. It is more the male leads like Pali and Sanatan who dominate the scene and space of the film. Chandrachur Singh and Om Puri were showered with critical acclaim and admiration for the delineation of the characters of Pali and Sanatan respectively, but it was Tabu's heart-wrenching portrayal of Veeran which won her not only critical acclaim and commercial success, but also National Award for the Best Actress. Tabu has always been believed to be a versatile actress who masters the art of carving sensitive characters effortlessly in numerous films.

As stated earlier, Veeran, though not delivering the conventional protagonist's part, is indispensable to the film. For the most part of the film, she remains invisible or mute, yet when she speaks, her words echo a sound of meaning and substance. Her character fulfils every condition of performativity that Butler proposes about in her idea of gender performativity. After having suffered substantial abuse and injustice, she surpasses the boundaries she is chained to. This surpassing is not an unproblematic task as she ends up sacrificing a lot for the cause. Executed with

exquisite finesse, Veeran's character speaks volumes about the depth and sensitivity she holds in the deep realms of her heart.

Through the span of the film, Veeran's character undergoes a substantial transformation. Audience witnesses a naive and rustic girl taking up arms and killing the perpetrators. Intense agony and need of vengeance fuels her heart and finding no vent, she treads the forbidden path, risking her life and future. While attempting to do so, she outlaws what Butler calls 'performativity' in her theory. For the major part of the movie, Veeran performs her gender. She walks, dresses, and behaves like the gendered society expects her to be performing. She is a domesticated woman, who has no higher ambitions in life apart from marrying Pali and settling down in life. The gender role that she chooses to perform during that phase of her life, subscribes to the fixed perceptions about behaviours and attitudes which are usually considered suitable, befitting, and attractive based on her actual sex.

Gendered roles, as discussed earlier, are centred on the notions of femininity and masculinity. The intricate details based on gender vary from culture to culture, while some characteristics being common to almost all the cultures. There has been an incessant debate about the extent to which gender norms are defined by biological features or social constructions. As stated earlier, Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble* proposes that it is not 'natural' to be a female and that it is projected to be natural only because of the repeated performance of the features associated with that particular gender. The traditional categories of sex and/or gender are defined by these performances. These gender roles are pro- patriarchy and subvert the rights of women or female gender. This gender normalcy is fully and judiciously executed by Veeran in the early phase of her life.

Several instances are sprinkled across the movie wherein Veeran is seen fitting into this gender normalcy. The film has an eerie opening with an extremely low angle shot with first the sound of something being taken out of the water and then water dripping, suggesting that the camera has been positioned in a well. The next shot shows policemen waiting outside the well; the setting is inside a jail late at night. The well is lit, and the camera moves onto the top of the well, showing a rope moving up and finally a corpse emerging out. The long, loose hair of the dead man suggests his Sikh identity. In the following scene, there is a discussion between the senior



policeman and his junior (Vohra) inside a moving car. The discussion signifies one of the major philosophies of the film that the human body cannot bear pain after a certain limit. If pain exceeds the limit, death becomes easier than suffering. The senior police officer's rebuke of Vohra and the callousness with which Vohra listens to his senior works in two ways. First, it introduces the audience to a very cruel and torturing policeman in the form of Vohra. Second, the opening scene sets the theme of the film.

The tense atmosphere of the scene cuts to a panoramic shot of snow-clad terrain, suggesting Himachal Pradesh. The song which is playing in the background with the highly meaningful lyrics succeeds in catching the attention of the audience and covers the edginess of the earlier scene. The lyrics of the song are highly suggestive of the condition of the four young men singing it. "*Chhod aaye hum vo galiyan....*" (We have left behind those streets) ("*Maachis*" 00:05:20). They sing and walk together; relaxed and light-hearted. The song serves the purpose of describing the idyllic beauty of their homeland through the metaphor of lady love. Suddenly, the pleasant tone of the song changes as an intense feel grips it. The song leads to a melancholic mood. The newspaper cuttings of the taking over of the Golden Temple, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the killing of Sikhs by mob are flashed through the screen with the titles like '*Attack On Golden Temple*', '*Indira Gandhi Assassinated*' and the explicit image of a victim of anti-Sikh riots is shown with the title '*Sikh Burnt Alive*'. The tone and lyrics of the song are vaguely suggestive of the injustice meted out to these men. The men are a team of militants who join together from various walks of life but wronged by the same system. The song playing in the background summarises the pain that memories of such gloomy past can create. The song leaves the listener with even more dejected state of mind compared to when the song had started, though it had starkly different trajectory at the beginning.

The next scene stands in total contrast to the previous two scenes, where the audience is introduced to the family of Veeran. Elderly mother Biji, Jassi and Veeran are approached by Pali who is driving a bike. Jassi plays hockey and Veeran finishes the chores inside. As Veeran opens the door, there is a close-up of Pali's face; and he winks at Veeran, who is her fiancée. Dialogues between Jassi and Pali show an intimate friendship between the two. The intimacy of the characters and warmth of the

household locates it as an ideal family. The conversation in English tells the audience about their educated background.

Here, Veeran is seen performing her gender duties. Gender roles, as defined earlier, refer to the roles men and women are traditionally expected to play based on their gender. Gender roles are based upon the multiplicity of expectations that individuals, societies, and groups have from individuals owing to their sex and based on the society's beliefs and ideals about that particular gender. A gender performance finds its basis in the idea that it is through the interaction between an individual and the society that the individual receives cues about what type of behaviour is deemed to be suitable from particular sex. It is through social codes that appropriate gender roles are ascribed to the individuals. Discussion on gender roles requires an understanding of the term gender. Very commonly gender is interchanged with term sex. However, sex and gender are not mutually exchangeable terms. Sex refers to a biological concept, determined on the basis of primary biological sex features.

Gender, on the contrary, refers to values, beliefs, meanings, and characteristics allocated to the different individuals based on their sex. It was Ann Oakley (1972), a premier social scientist, who brought to the forefront the debate on distinguishing features of sex and gender. She states that gender is a socially constructed concept by humans, through their interaction with society and each other, yet the formation of gender relies heavily on the biological features of being male and female. She opines:

The social construction of gender is demonstrated by the fact that individuals, groups, and societies ascribe particular traits, statuses, or values to individuals purely because of their sex, yet these ascriptions differ across societies and cultures, and over time within the same society. Gender roles are the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex. (45)

Talking about the gender roles she further states:

Traditionally, many Western societies have believed that women are more nurturing than men. Therefore, the traditional view of the feminine gender role prescribes that women should behave in ways that are nurturing. One way that a woman might engage in the traditional feminine gender role would be to nurture her family by

working full-time within the home rather than taking employment outside of the home. Men, on the other hand, are presumed by traditional views of gender roles to be leaders. The traditional view of the masculine gender role, therefore, suggests that men should be the heads of their households by providing financially for the family and making important family decisions. (50)

Veeran, is a good, cultured, and domesticated girl who finds contentment in looking after her house and family, performing her gender. She is laughing and joking with her fiancé and taking good care of her aged mother as well as brother. The scene also introduces a pivotal conflict that leads to future actions hinted through the two earlier sequences. They all discuss the proposed marriage between Pali and Veeran and Veeran projects as if she is against the idea of getting married quickly. As Jassi is the one closest to Veeran, he notices her freeze. Shortly after that, an unmarked car appears and an image is shown watching from the outside. As Pali opens the door, a policeman forces himself into the house. Pali tries to seek an explanation from the policemen but is ignored. Pali addresses the policeman as Vohra. Jassi, Pali, and Veeran are repeatedly pestered to disclose if they are hiding any terrorists. Khurana discloses that a terrorist has shot at MP and is on run from the police. The sudden rushing in and the unruly behaviour of the police without even explaining the reason prompts Jassi to make fun of the police by showing his dog whose name is Jimmy. Taking away of Jassi, without any arrest warrant is another instance of misuse of power by the police. When Pali makes an attempt to locate Jassi, he comes across the corridors of the corrupt and callous authorities. Jassi's questioning and impromptu arrest might well be inspired by operation 'Woodrose'. Joyce Pettigrew states that during the operation, any male seen with "a flowing beard was branded as a terrorist and eliminated" (36). The lawyer, whom Pali meets for locating Jassi, is himself disillusioned. When Pali wonders if there is no law regarding such arrests, the lawyer replies, "Law had been there...from the beginning. But with these keys, those locks cannot be opened anymore. So, people have started breaking them" ("*Maachis*" 00:20:07).

Her gender performativity is what Veeran has been executing so far. She never knew a world outside her home and apparently been very content with her duty of

taking care of her household. A turning point in her personality comes when the traditional caretaker of her family, her brother, disappears. She is exceedingly disturbed and speechless at the sudden turn of events. She had not been an extrovert at any stage of her life, but now she has grown quieter. The sudden disappearance of her brother has deeply shaken her from the core. Despite being deeply disturbed, she takes up all the responsibility of her household. She is no more Veeran who confined herself to the four walls of the house; cooking and cleaning. She has changed perceptibly and left behind her conventional femininity. Veeran has taken over the responsibilities of daily life. The sound of the tractor startles Jassi and he realises that it is Veeran who is driving it. Pali had taught her tractor driving. She looks after the fields and cattle; does all the outdoor work women in traditional patriarchal societies are not expected to do. She shoulders the responsibility with full sincerity and dedication. The change in circumstances pushes her into a more responsible position in terms of the financial management of the house. Her actions are benign but indicative of impending metamorphosis of her personality. Her dress remains to be the same, Salwar Kameez but her mannerism changes to being more active and assertive. Here she transgresses her gender role of being domesticated and restricting herself to play effeminate actions only.

Veeran and Pali are utterly stunned at Jassi's return after fifteen days. Fortunately, he is not dead in an 'encounter' but returns home alive. He is mercilessly beaten, battered, bruised, and severely tortured. This forms a turning point in their lives when *Maachis* (matchsticks) ignite the fire of rage and vengeance in Pali's mind. Jassi, while Veeran and Pali are tending to his wounds, says he wishes that he was killed by police rather than being subjected to that torture. When Veeran confronts Pali after she finds a gun in a haystack, he slaps her across the face and walks away angrily. A pivotal philosophy of the film that defines the transformation of Veeran from a regular next-door girl to a dreaded shooter is exposed by the discussions of the neighbours on finding the cruelty done to Jassi by the police. The centripetal debate of the film happens in this context when two men deliberate upon the state of events. While one is of the opinion that terrorists too have rampaged terror across the nation, the other one opines "Do terrorists grow in the field? Didn't you see this? This is how they are born. The bloody country doesn't seem ours anymore. The govt. doesn't

seem ours” (“*Maachis*” 00:25:54). The situation is compared to that of feudal system where anarchy ruled the roost.

Suddenly one day Pali disappears and neither Veeran, Jassi nor Pali’s grandfather have any idea about his location. The only information that the grandfather has is that Pali asked for the address of his cousin Jeetay. Jeetay, despite having a graduation degree, was unable to find a job for himself and had become one of *those guys*. Veeran is surrounded by gloom and anxiously looks forward to the return of Pali. She is slowly and steadily getting gripped by pessimism, loneliness, and disenchantment.

Overpowered by grief and helplessness, Pali tries to locate Jeetay, who has become one of the militants but encounters Sanatan, who was planting a time bomb in the bus. It is by focusing the camera on the face of Pali by which his immense surprise is reflected as he hears the sound of the blast in the background. This was his first-hand experience of a terrorist attack. The other three youth are identified as Kuldeep, Wazeeray, and Jaimal, while Sanatan is planning an attack to be conducted. Ever since his entry into the group of Sanatan, Pali faces numerous surprises and how the group works. The commander is the chief of the group. While in the group, Pali gets increasingly convinced of the need to revolt. Sanatan’s principals of freedom, which also reflect in the actions and reactions of Veeran, run as undercurrent philosophy of the film. He emphasises that his fight is not fighting for any religious or national cause. But, he has to fight to reclaim his fundamental civil rights as a human. His war is against a system that thrives on the victimisation of the innocents and devaluates the lives of common people.

Veeran having disappeared from the narrative for a while resurfaces with transformed identity in the latter part of the film. Till now she has borne quite a lot and is no more a naive, jovial, and regular girl that she once was. Torture of her brother at the hands of police and separation from Pali has turned her into a gloomy and quiet spirit. With the help of his aids, Pali succeeds in killing Khurana in a wide daylight in a market place. Once having taken this extreme step, it becomes impossible for him to lead an ordinary life. Back in Veeran’s village, police patrolling becomes intense, a sign of tensions on a large scale. The increased vigil by the police and the inability of Pali to return to normal domestic fold presents the nation as a non-

forgiving entity that is not ready to take back anyone who had questioned its authority and revolted against its sovereignty. Once back home, as Pali describes the murder of Khurana to Veeran, he breaks down and declares that Jassi's arrest and subsequent torture filled him with rage and ignited a fire in him. Although Veeran is seemingly very disturbed by Pali's actions, she listens to Pali with tears in her eyes but very curtly asks him "Has the fire subsided now that now you have killed him?" ("*Maachis*" 01:08:40 ). Pali has no answer to this question. The narrative so far focused on the events of Operation Woodrose, the strength of Jassi and Pali's friendship and Pali's transformation as a terrorist. Here the narrative takes a turn, reflecting that Veeran ascribes her life to be meaningless without the presence of Pali; so she decides to accompany him. In the subsequent scene, as Pali tries to leave the village, Veeran follows him. She earnestly admits that marriage is not necessary for her as she had already accepted him as her husband. This dialogue ensues as they embrace as to pour out their agony and pain.

Pali: Death roams with me wherever I go.

Veeran: (faces Pali and asks) Are you afraid...of death?

Pali: (visibly distressed) I am scared...of dying, since that would mean going away from you for good. I am afraid of dying all alone away from you, Veeran!

Veeran: (pleading): Then I will come with you. Take me with you Pali, Please! Don't refuse; I'll die with you only! ("*Maachis*" 01:12:21)

This dialogue between Veeran and Pali is indicative of Veeran's resolute and determined temper whereby she is not sceptical of her uncertain future with Pali. So much so, that Veeran, who essentially is a rural girl coming from the relatively conservative background, goes to the extent of taking Pali as her husband even without any formal ceremony. The reason could be that she believed the marriage of souls is more essential than a worldly marriage of the bodies. In this aspect, Veeran turns out to be a very bold and unorthodox personality, who is extremely liberal in her opinions and overthrows any attempts to restrict her. She is so much overpowered by the emotions and intensity of her passion that she did not even hesitate to choose a path that was forbidden for her gender, emerging as a New Woman and not performing her gender.

Veeran's attempts in joining Pali are foiled by him, and thereby, he refutes even the last possible dimension of the family. After having visited Jassi and Veeran, Pali returns to his hideout, only to find it deserted. The missing of the militant group and impossibility of normal family life leaves Pali dejected. Unaware of the happenings, Pali roams around and eventually led to the new hideout of the group, where the commander is waiting for him. The real self of the group is revealed when the commander gives him a warning not to get caught by the police. Giving a warning to Pali, Commander says, "Police won't kill. Jeetay was not killed by the police" ("*Maachis*" 01:19:45). The dreadful nature of the militant group is revealed through this warning of the commander. This further solidifies when Kuldeep asks to be freed of the mission. Though he is promised a free and ordinary life, he is shown blown into tatters by the bomb planted in his backpack while on his way to his village. This incident is indicative of both the sovereignty of nation-state and eulogising it as not being directly involved in the killings of the militants, and at the same time, hints that wayward youth could not be taken into the mainstream because of their anti-national stance hence had to be killed. By now, Pali has established his full-fledged identity of being a militant- a life he had come to terms to. He is informed by Sanatan that a new attack is being planned, and for the purpose, the cell will be soon joined by a specialist in rocket launching technique. The expert, no other than Tabu arrives in her slacks and not salwar. Pali has a look of disbelief in his eyes as he looks at Veeran astoundingly. Seemingly, Veeran is equally surprised too. Veeran is no more the vulnerable and coy girl.

In one of her interview, on being questioned how to evaluate the diverse innovative forms of agency, because not everything that is novel is good, Butler replies:

I believe it is not appropriate to speak of good or bad genders: gender is extra-moral. Those who wish to establish the distinction between normal genders and pathological genders, or who set out to regulate gender are making a mistake. They are absolutely and universally wrong. There are illegitimate operations of power that attempt to restrict our idea of what gender might be, for example in the areas of medicine, law, psychiatry, social policy, immigration policy, or the

policies against violence. My commitment involves opposition to all restrictive and violent measures that are used to regulate and restrict the life of gender. There are certain types of freedoms and practices that are very important for human flourishing. Any excessive restriction of gender limits, or undermines, the capacity of humans to flourish. (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 67)

Veeran as well, by taking up arms which essentially goes against her fundamental characteristics, opposing all restrictive and violent measures and powers that try to regulate and restrict her gender.

The discursiveness of feminine-masculine gender roles is replaced by new assertive masculinity by Veeran, hence transgressing her gender role. Veeran's earlier understated femininity transforms into overtly expressed typical features of masculinity in this phase of the film. Gulzar being the master narrator succeeds in retaining the touch of humanity and still the domesticated is liberated through the weapon under the force of circumstances. The change in circumstances has established a new relationship between the two: live and die together in their newly assumed roles. At this juncture, both of them appear to be oblivious of their state, weapons and assigned mission.

Veeran is first addressed as Pali's Veeran by Sanatan. Veeran's infinite affection towards Pali prompted her to take the unusual and risky path. She has followed Pali's steps and succeeds in reuniting with him. In this regard, Amy Blackstone in her article discusses gender-based demarcation about the type of duties a gender should perform. She states:

Gender roles can be linked to expectations of males and females in realms outside of the family as well, such as work in the workplace, men and women are often expected to perform different tasks and occupy different roles based on their sex. Gender stereotypes tend to include exaggerated or erroneous assertions about the nature of males and females. For example, a common gender stereotype about males is that they are not emotional. Females, on the other hand, are commonly stereotyped as being irrational or overly emotional. (337)



Veeran not only overcomes her emotional weakness by taking up the arms but also opts for a very life-threatening and risky alternative.

The meeting remains to be bittersweet as Veeran narrates the events that occurred after he left. Jassi was arrested again and Biji passed away in grief. Police's atrocities against Jassi reached its peak this time, and he is denied permission to go home. This news promptly reminds the viewers about the body being taken out of the well as the credits had started rolling. That body was of Jassi, as he preferred to kill himself when he could not tolerate the police atrocities anymore.

Pali, shortly after Veeran joins the group, observes that Veeran wears a small tube of cyanide around her neck all the time. As Pali questions her, she half-amusingly replies that the cyanide thread is her *mangalsutra*, the sacred thread bride wears around her neck after the marriage. Her wearing the symbolic sacred thread is indicative of her defiance to the conventional norms of the society about marriage and companionship. She is daring and bold in that regard, summarily disregarding any formal liaison between them in order to wear the thread. Pali also takes out his thread from under the shirt and tells Veeran, "Without you here with me; death was easy. Now that you're here, you've made it difficult for me. Now I crave to live" (*"Maachis"* 01:52:24 ).

P. Korpi in his thesis *The Notion of Gender As A Norm in Judith Butler's Thought* discusses Butler's idea of gender and performativity in a comprehensive manner. He states that several critical challenges to the contemporary feministic theories have been highlighted by Butler's theory. In this regard, he proposes two key concerns. He states:

1. One need not necessarily know the norms according to which one acts, in the mode of being able to state them in language. Rather, one rarely reflects on these norms as far as they do not run into a crisis. Indeed, the regulating function of norms seems to base mainly on something else than explicitly articulated coercion or force, even though these may time to time function to secure the obedience to the norm.
2. When one acts in accordance with the norm of gender, this may feel the most natural and unproblematic thing to do. But,

whenever one's conduct, one way or another, challenges the norm of gender, one will certainly face some kind of social punishment. (5)

Veeran, as per the first concern, by flouting her gender performativity and becoming a militant by taking up arms, never reflected upon the gender norms until she encounters a crisis. There has been no coercion and force in her shirking her gender roles, yet she internalises this necessity only when a crisis has befallen her. Secondly, as long as she was a naive, rustic, and ignorant girl, that was the most expected and trouble-free thing to do. But, when she takes up arms to avenge her brother's death and desire to be with her fiancé, she is punished by social and legal frameworks.

Between the tussle of life and death, Pali loses *his* thread, foreshadowing death and life intermittently. Pali and Veeran's relationship changes the whole dynamics of the film, as now Veeran is seen to be a ray of hope and means of revival. A hope that perhaps their destiny would change for the better and reform Pali's connection with terrorism or a hope that the fire of revenge ignited in the heart of Pali is minuscule compared to the fire that burns with sheen between Pali and Veeran.

Veeran's singing of *Paani Paani Re* at this point symbolises the ocean of tears that she hides in deep recesses of her heart. The word *paani* in Hindi means water, but Gulzar has utilised *paani* to define tears. Veeran sings this song; it is quite ironic though, after laughing and smiling with Pali, and being happy to be together, they are afraid of imminent death that hangs around in the form of cyanide capsules worn around their necks. As Veeran has rejoined Pali's life, Pali has extinguished the *Maachis* that burnt within him. This becomes more obvious when Pali tells Veeran that as long as she was not around, it was easier to die. Now he craves to live. As the trace of old tender, cheerful, and upbeat Pali becomes obvious, Veeran may be employing this song to bring old Pali back and persuade him to leave the terrorist ways. The song is pictured focusing on Veeran only, and although there is no hint of water- symbolic of tears, yet her persona is grave, her face is a window to the pain inside her.

At some point in the song, Pali is shown standing behind Veeran, while Veeran stands facing the camera positions itself to face Veeran directly and Pali is shown right behind her. Pali's standing behind Veeran is metaphorical, as Pali fails to express his sentiments as effectively as Veeran. As Rajabali states in the article A

*Song and Dance About Everything*, Pali cannot express it, so Veeran is the channel to express their combined sentiments (61). Neither of them reaches out to comfort the other, standing at a distance, but their mutual silence at the conclusion of the song is an opportunity for them to sooth their agonised souls.

The time passes unhurriedly and one day as Inspector Vohra is spotted by Pali, a chase ensues. Vohra and his men swiftly trap and arrest Pali. When Sanatan learns about the happening, he is full of frenzy and coated with suspicion. He apprehends that Pali's arrest will sabotage their upcoming plan. He believes Pali and Veeran are on the side of the police and have been deceiving the militant group. He intends to kill Pali even before he could be taken to the police station. Subsequently, Veeran is confined to a room, and instead of her, Sanatan takes up the task of attacking the entourage of politicians with a missile launcher. The narration is quick here, and Veeran escapes from the confinement after killing Wazeeray. Holding a gun in her hand, she looks for protection in the jungle. She is unknowingly being followed by Sanatan as he is in the same woods. At the same time, the army also starts an intense hunt for the attacker. Veeran having been given utmost care and love in the group earlier is brought down to the level of a culprit with the supposed treachery of Pali. Veeran while risking her life to save Pali, promptly shoots down Sanatan. To make sure that Sanatan is dead, she climbs up the rocks. At this point, Veeran directly targets her gun towards the camera, as the camera zooms into her face -as if proclaiming she is not a terrorist. She was forced to join the outfit only to extinguish the matchsticks that burned inside the mind of Pali and the likes of him because of the separatist ideology of Sanatan.

These are the key events of the film that bring the strength of Veeran's character, her potential, and determination to the pinnacle. A rural, shy, and unexposed girl transforms into an individual who is self-assured, confident, as well as ruthless as she did not even hesitate to kill Wazeeray and Sanatan; her consorts and comrades in her fight. So much so, she passes on cyanide to Pali whom she loved intensely, in order to save him from further police atrocities.

Having still not been identified as a member of the group, Veeran makes a plan to visit Pali in jail. Her ties to Pali are discussed by Vohra and another officer. Vohra advises that Veeran might give access to the information about the other

members of the group. Veeran is not allowed to visit Pali in the visiting room but his cell. As like Jassi, Pali is also badly thrashed and beaten by the police. The sight is unbearable for Veeran who was inconsolable to see the condition of Pali, and while being in his embrace, she says, “I have brought it. Put it in your mouth. I can’t take it” (“*Maachis*” 02:28:35). ‘It’ basically is the cyanide tube tied with the thread worn by them around their necks. Pali never ‘lost’ his as Veeran had preserved both of the threads as a sign of her *mangalsutra*. Both look at each other intently, mute words reflecting that it is only in their imminent death that they can reunite. They kiss tenderly, Veeran passing the cyanide to Pali, uttering inaudible promises to meet in the other world and saying their valedictory note. Pali smiles the same amiable smile like the way he did in the first few scenes as Veeran slowly walks away and the guard announces the visiting time is up. Metaphorically speaking, Veeran has extinguished the fire of *Maachis* in the mind of Pali. Pali lies down and smiles, alone in his cell. While being on her way back, Veeran, who is sitting alone in the back of a truck in the midst of luggage, also smiles. The final scene is shot in the same setting seen from the beginning of the film. A voice loudly reverberates “*Chhod Aaye hum Wo Galiyan*” (“*Maachis*” 02:31:36), and the dead bodies of Veeran and Pali are shown with finality. A soft instrumental version of the same song plays in the background. A newspaper screenshot follows showing news clipping Supreme Court order to prosecute twenty-seven Punjab police cops. The same news rolls against a black background and finally gives way to credits rolling against a blue backdrop.

Veeran’s character’s relevance for the analysis of gender performativity can easily be put under suspicion and uncertainty as Veeran is not a conventional female lead occupying prominent screen space. Her physical presence in the narrative of the film is scarce and not very pronounced, particularly in the first half of the film. Yet, there can be no denying the fact that she, despite her relatively less screen presence, qualifies to be a representative of the emergence of New Woman. Her character is a key point of reference to the film, as she intends to revenge the death of her brother as well as be a support to her fiancé like a dedicated wife, even out of wedlock. She, through her personality traits like being resistant, autonomous, resolute, prudent, and audacious, secures a place for herself in the league of New Woman. She resists authoritative socio-cultural powers like corrupt police and judiciary. She is also

autonomous and resolute as her decision to join Pali, without his wish, is autonomous and firm in nature. Her decision to join militants is cautious with properly calculated planning and training as a missile shooter. She is audacious indeed, as taking such a major decision about one's life calls for bold and daring persona, she also does not hesitate in killing Wazeeray and Sanatan. She also hands over cyanide to Pali and chews it herself. She is the epitome of New Woman as she is not trying to be masculine in her approach, rather trying to explore her inner strength by traversing through the unknown, dangerous, and unfamiliar domains, following her mind and her heart.

## Chapter 4

### **The World of Women and *Chandni Bar*: A Jamesonian Perspective**

The current chapter on *Chandni Bar* discusses the strife and struggle its protagonist Mumtaz undergoes in order to emerge as a New Woman in the postmodern times. The film is an apt critique of the trials and tribulation the women in modern developing countries like India undergo in the wake of postmodern sensibilities and social structures. Such women are doubly subjugated as they are neither fully equipped to embrace the changing dynamics of the society, nor they have any social or economic shield or support to encounter the problems they come across. Through the narrative of Mumtaz's life in this cinematic form, the chapter intends to dissect the film from three of Fredric Jameson's postulates in order to establish interconnectivity between these postulates/ theories and actions and reactions of the life of the protagonist and other characters in postmodern times. An attempt will be made to analyse how Mumtaz's life can be viewed and assessed from the mirror of the ideas viz. Schizophrenia, Depthlessness, and Pastiche. *Chandni Bar* (2001) in its depiction of Mumbai underworld, including prostitution, dance bars, gun crimes, and highlights the gritty life of Mumbai. The film, directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, has been short-listed as a sample for the analysis as it is a representative of the perfect dismantling of the human space and life by the forces originating from postmodern power structures and ideology. Ideas of New Depthlessness, Pastiche, and Emotional Schizophrenia are prominently sprinkled across the movie, making it apt for the analysis.

*Chandni Bar* is the story of a rustic and naive girl who turns a bar dancer, reflecting on the pathetic lives of the girls who lose themselves in the harsh light and smoke of the dance bars. It is a very hard-hitting film and an attempt to delineate the lives of the dance girls who juggle between prostitution and cabaret. Mumtaz arrives in Bombay with her alcoholic uncle after her parents were killed in riots in Uttar Pradesh. Here, she is forced to join the dance bar as there is no other way of sustenance. Though initially reluctant and feeling awkward, she gradually learns the tricks of the trade. Her life moves along until she is physically assaulted by her uncle. A gangster Potya marries her and stabs her uncle after finding out the truth. Mumtaz

is grateful for leaving that life behind as she dreams for a 'normal' household for herself and her children. Potya is killed in a police encounter and her son, abused by jail mates becomes a gangster. Her daughter, in order to secure the release of her brother from police custody, becomes a bar dancer. Mumtaz's life and her struggle for the secure future of her children come to a standstill as both the children become alter-egos of their parents.

It has often been believed that Fredric Jameson (b. 14 April 1934) is probably the "most important cultural critic writing in English today" (Mac Cabe ix) or as Perry Anderson put it in his introduction to Jameson's *Selected Writing on the Postmodernism* (1998) "the most arresting and impressive theorist of postmodernism" (xii). He claims an extraordinary range of analysis, comprising everything from science fiction to architecture, from the nineteenth-century novel to the cinema, from philosophy to avant-garde art. Jameson is the leading Marxist cultural theorist and critic. Jameson's biography goes some way towards explaining the variety of his interests. He is the Knut Schmidt-Nielsen Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the Institute for Critical Theory at Duke University, since 1985. Jameson has received several awards in his academic life including the 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the 2008 Holberg International Memorial for his career-long research on the relation between social formations and cultural forms. Jameson was a key figure in the revival of Marxist literary criticism in the United States in the 1970s found the Marxist Literary Group (MLG) at California State University, San Diego in 1969. Propounded in the early 1980s, his works on very contemporary themes of postmodernity and late capitalism were determining in shaping the ground for the concept of postmodernity in key academic circles. It was primarily as a Marxist that Jameson first came to prominence. He always derives his insights from and always relates to a left-wing perspective on culture and literature, but he never acts as a preacher, and his appeal by no means is limited to only those sharing his political views. His critical approach is full of range and flexibility.

Jameson has published a wide range of works over the past four decades, analysing a variety of texts, while training in his own neo-Marxist theoretical ideology. He also produced many important critiques of opposing theoretical schools

and positions. Jameson, being an influential writer, has cultivated an astounding number of theoretical discourses into his venture. *The Prison-House of Language* (1972), *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979), *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) are some of his classic testaments on a variety of themes. His *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), one of the central books of Jameson is used for the reference in this thesis is the most iconic work authored by Jameson. He has also authored several volumes of essays including *The Ideologies of Theory* (1988). His anthologies of films and visual culture include *Signatures of the Visible* (1991) and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992).

He has also been pioneering in many contemporary debates and analysing a variety of cultural texts spanning from films to novels and from fairy tales to postmodernism. Before doing the analysis of the film, it is worth providing a brief outline of his statement concerning the relationship between a capitalist-driven society and postmodernism. Vincent B. Leitch, in *Postmodern Interdisciplinarity*, cites Jameson's notion about the states of postmodernism:

...is not just another word for the description of a particular style. It is also, at least in my use, a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and new economic order – what is often euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism. (23)

*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984) is Jameson's magisterial analysis of cultural production in the twentieth century. The debate about postmodernism took off after Jameson published a version of his arguments in an essay in *The New Left Review* (1984) and the book, which reprinted the essay with nine additional chapters, followed seven years later. It was to identify ironic playfulness expressed in different media characteristics of a particular moment in the late twentieth century which prompted Jameson to use the term 'postmodernism'. This was the time when the divide between high and low media had dissolved and everything, no matter how sacred, could be parodied. The concept of 'late capitalism'



originally belonged to Frankfurt School but was developed by the economist Ernest Mandel in the 1950s and 60s. Mandel identified a third stage in the history of capitalism quite different from the two preceding it. In the book, Jameson uses Mandel's concept of 'late capitalism' to characterise the present cultural condition as the result of multinational capitalist dispersement. As per Jameson, the culture is defined by how the production is done. Consequently, the postmodern condition can best be understood as relying upon the 'Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' for its existence—a new social condition that does not obey the rules of classical capitalism, i.e., the primacy of industrial production and the presence of class struggle. In Jameson's argument, if realism corresponds with market capitalism and modernism with imperialism, then this third, multinational moment is, for lack of a better word, postmodern.

This matter of periodization is not, however, altogether alien to the signals given off by the expression "late capitalism," which is by now clearly identified as a kind of leftist logo which is ideologically and politically booby-trapped, so that the very act of using it constitutes tacit agreement about a whole range of essentially Marxian social and economic propositions the other side may be far from wanting to endorse. *Capitalist* was itself always a funny word in this sense: just using the word - otherwise a neutral enough designation for an economic social system on whose properties all sides agree - seemed to position you in a vaguely critical suspicious, if not outright socialist stance: only committed right-wing ideologues and full-throated apologists also use it with the same relish. (Jameson, "Postmodernism" 24)

Jameson meant to signify a decisive break not just with the previous period but also with that period's experience of time and space techniques of representation, emotional state, historical consciousness, modes of perception, and artistic anatomy. Frequently cited examples of postmodern sensibilities are Van Gogh's pair of boots, with the textures and colours that made them look and feel authentic, became Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, a silkscreen image of mismatched women's slippers. It's widely believed that we have not only missed the likelihood of any perfection in

our lives but we are not even aware of this loss anymore. Totality has absolutely and permanently vanished as if it was never there. The nostalgia or desire to regain unity has annihilated. For most of the postmodern critics, this loss of unified totality is basically desirable, as it's simply an illusion. The notion of unity was basically manipulated to deny the truth. The postmodern critics are not lamenting the loss of any unity as they believe it never existed in the first place. The fact is there is no perfect way to decipher how the pieces of the world and the self can fit together. Such a likelihood is possible only when there is an attempt to stop seeking totality and unity; we are ready to face reality. Jameson states:

What "late" generally conveys is rather the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the lifeworld which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive. (133)

However, it is not true that all postmodernist theorists believe in the attack on the totality. Jameson, working within the analysis of the society and within the framework of master narrative, declines taking it without suspicion and comprehensive critical analysis. Jameson claims that debate on totality is still a relevant idea because it helps us to understand all the disjointed pieces of the world. It is unlikely that there can be an absolute success; yet making an effort gives knowledge, resulting in more power. As a Marxist, Jameson also believes in the idea of people having highest possible control over their lives. Contrary to many other Marxists opinions who think that such control eventually results in inevitable dominance over others, Jameson argues that it is possible to control our destinies without violating the freedom of the others. He states:

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism in which premonition of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the "crisis" of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare

state, etc., etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasing called postmodernism. (89)

For this purpose, it is pertinent to understand the world, not just in parts, but the totality of it. As a Marxist, Jameson believes that above all, our lives are formed by modes of production that exist in our society including human labour, natural resources, technologies, investment capital, etc. and our way of organising these tools.

Jameson believes that capitalism has succeeded in keeping us oblivious and ignorant about the factors deciding the course of our lives. We are unable to see totality, the 'big picture'. Consequently, it has made us incapable to even fathom novel and innovative ways of arranging our lives. Even less is the probability of incorporating any new thinking in our lives. Jameson believes that every mode of production has its own characteristic of predominant culture: its particular lifestyle, way of speaking, arts, fashion, religion, etc. Not only this, cultural styles change with the change in the mode of production. The shift in our culture from modernity to postmodernity owes its cause in the change of modes of production.

The first six decades or so of the twentieth century were still part of modernity and monopolistic capitalism. It was during the middle of the nineteenth century that some major changes transpired in the mode of production. Ernest Mandel in his *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory* (2002) elaborates on these changes and their causes. As per Mandel, the first change was caused due to the large scale expansion of multinational corporations. Secondly, tried and tested European style colonialism did not prove to be effective for multinational economies anymore. It was only when the rich natives managed a higher level of control over their own countries; multinational companies registered more profit. Third and perhaps the most crucial change that came about was that computers, mass media, and information processing replaced old electrically powered machines. The main function of machines was to save and replicate images like words, pictures, and graphs, etc. that contain data rather than producing original commodities (115-150). These changes declared shift to current multinational late capitalism from old-style monopoly capitalism. The development of such capitalist powers from its classical mode to its monopolistic mode and 'late' modes can be understood, in Mandel's reading, as an imminent progression of social logic.

As stated earlier, Modern age was marked with monopolistic capitalism, whereas postmodernism is attributed to be the culture of multinational late capitalism. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* starts with these words: "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (ix). While describing the postmodern as a 'Cultural Revolution' in capitalist relations, Jameson notes that:

The fundamental ideological task of the new concept ...must remain that of coordinating new forms of practice and social, mental habits...with the new forms of economic production and organization thrown up by the modifications of capitalism in recent years (Jameson, "Postmodernism" xiv).

It can conveniently be said that Jameson as an influential critic of the present generation has made significant contributions in locating interconnectivity between postmodernism and social, political, and economic developments. Jameson asserts that there is a viable, obvious, and distinctive culture of postmodernism, but that culture cannot be attributed to being anything more than the result of the Cultural Logic of the current state of capitalism (111). Jameson believes that though the genealogy of cultural logic of postmodernism is still complicated to be mapped out on the structural developments of capitalism, but does not rule out the complete probability of such likelihood. He states that it will be possible when Marxism has assimilated some of the theoretical frameworks of the current social movements like feminism into it (129). Jamesonian critic David S Gross writes that Jameson attempts to convince us that to analyse the milieu we live in, including the individual, communal, and civilising reality we have to deal with in current human existence, it is essential to understand the effects of capitalism. He states:

In opposition to anti-historicist views, Jameson seeks to convince us that to analyze (to theorize successfully, to conceptualize) the world we live in - the personal, social, Cultural reality we have to deal with in living human existence -is to understand the effects of capitalism. In full awareness of the enormous changes since the time of Marx, and in no way taking specific words of Marx as dicta or dogma, Jameson

argues as a Marxist that extremely diverse phenomena are "symptomatic" of life under capitalism; that architecture, movies, rock music, literature, Cultural phenomena generally (including, especially, the history of thought and of critical theory) can best be understood as historically specific manifestations of late capitalism, that such an understanding is necessary if other modes of interpretation or understanding are to be effective, accurate, and truthful. (74)

Jameson brings both the positive and negative characteristics of postmodernism to the forefront in his analysis: for him, it is both a sign of calamity and evolution altogether. In this regard, George Ritzer comments, "Capitalism is productive of liberation and very valuable advancement as well as being the height of exploitation and alienation. In fact, postmodernity is dialectical" (45). The consumer is at the core of postmodernity. Here we are the spectators to the growth of multinational marketing in the form of images and information. This phase is marked by the world of global telecommunication networks and huge media webs spanning continents. It is on national borders that information networks run and a vast network of cosmopolitan business corporations hold more power than many individual nation-states.

With specialised tastes and interests, smaller groups of consumers are created due to consumer capital expansion. There is an unstoppable demand for their ever-growing range of different commodities. Consequently, for the population, the market has split into a baffling variety of consumer goods. As Jameson suggests, a global image market has pervaded into the personal and national identities, reflective of the absence of any big combined project. Undoubtedly, ultimately, these identities are invariably orchestrated by one global hegemonic power (late capitalism) which has aggressively intruded into all the aspects of life and almost every nation-state. In this regard Ritzer writes:

Jameson has tried to give an image of postmodern society in which people are adrift in, and unable to comprehend, the multinational capitalist system or the explosively growing culture in which they live. Here space replaces time. In fact, even time itself has become spatialized. Jameson, for example, says that there is spatialization of music. "You no longer offer a musical object for contemplation and

gestation; you wipe up the context and make space musical around the consumer. The end of time is also related to the end of the search for origins as well as for a talon toward which the worlds headed.” (43)

Unlike many other postmodernist critics, Jameson acknowledges a concrete demarcation between high and low culture. As per his definition, low culture imparts transitory pleasure to the masses and which is cheaper in comparison with the high culture. High modernism, accused of destroying the delicate fabric of the traditional modes of living, and older neighbourhoods, is criticised by the postmodern ideologies. He notes that postmodernist has been:

...fascinated by the whole ‘degraded’ landscape of Schlock and Kitsch, of TV series and Readers’ Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of television late shows and Grade B Hollywood films, of so-called ‘para-literature’ with its airport paperback, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel. (Jameson, “Postmodernism” 112)

Jameson states that postmodern culture is made of unsubstantial signs including popular culture, art, cinema, architecture, and literature all tossed together in incoherent and meaningless combination. A general waning of affect is seen by Jameson everywhere, and he defines it as the disappearance of historicity, stripping any meaningfulness associated with it and imparting hollowness. It is a perpetual short-sightedness in which the citizens of postmodern world exist, and they have lost their ability to know their own past. Deep interpretations and sensible meanings have given way to superficiality and incoherence of the decentralised global media. There is a dominance of culture in the present period of postmodernism, yet this culture is not consistent and is made up of assorted and defiant elements that postmodernism is making efforts to restrain and control. Jameson argues that visual media is the most suitable entity for the leading positive forces within the postmodern culture. It includes cartoons, computers and information technology. He asserts:

Everything can now be text in that sense (daily life, the body, political representations), while objects that were formerly ‘works’ can now be re-read as immense ensembles of systems of texts of various kinds, superimposed on cards by way of the various inter-textualities,

successions of fragments, or, yet again, sheer process... The autonomous works of art thereby – along with the old autonomous subject or ego – seem to have vanished, to have been volatilized. (117)

Jameson believes that all we have is the only text in postmodern culture and even that text is without any regulation.

Jameson's original *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* published in 1983 limited itself to describing 'only two of (postmodernism's) significant features that Jameson called Schizophrenia and Pastiche. The essay, which was published later on in *New Left Review* (1984) as an enlargement to the original piece, considerably expanded on the original concepts. The essay formed the first chapter of the book.

As Aline Jerry Flieger defines both paranoia and schizophrenia are modes of knowledge or ways of interpreting the world or viewing the self (87). Schizophrenia is a mode of knowledge which assumes that the world is comprised of multiple narratives, and also the psychological response to the conditions of postmodernity. To be understood through schizophrenia, the experience of postmodernity is too fragmented, multiple, and overloaded with information (Harvey 43). Interestingly, a new way of interpreting individuality through schizophrenia is not proposed by postmodernism, which reflects that for us to understand the world schizophrenically, the world must be interpreted through a new mode of knowledge; not incorporating agency and identity.

The film analysed in this chapter attempts to investigate the world from the perspective of an emotionally schizophrenic mind. It will be analysed how it is constructed within the film and what this means for postmodern selfhood of the female protagonist. The film selected for the purpose, *Chandni Bar* presents new ways of interpreting agency and identity through the postmodern sensibility of Schizophrenia, Depthlessness, and Pastiche. Interestingly, Madhur Bhandarkar, the director, while making *Chandni Bar* early stage in Indian postmodernity is specifically grappling with how characters can turn into schizophrenic modes of interpreting the world and how an individual's agency and selfhood are affected by this.

Inspired by Jacques Lacan's model of language and psyche; the schizophrenia that Jameson refers to is the loss of identity and self because characters are inept and

incapable of synthesising events happening around. In his theory, Lacan is quoted as stating that language is the fundamental feature of the formation of the mature psyche (Olivier 7). Schizophrenia occurs when there is a significant breakdown in the signifying communication. Consequently, the idea of there being a one to one relationship between the signifier and the signified is rejected; rather, there is a meaning-effect that emerges through the movement between them both. And when this particular link is broken, the result is schizophrenia arising out of the wreckage of distinct yet unrelated signifiers. Jameson links consumer capitalism to postmodernism and postmodernism to schizophrenia. He intends to say that contemporary criticism, in the form of postmodern culture, has been the mode to carry forward the symptoms of schizophrenia to the masses. The possibility of any critical perspective gets destroyed in the schizophrenic confusion. Capitalist consumer culture thrives unstopped in a fragmented cultural milieu. When a culture is diagnosed as schizophrenic, it is not fully human, as a schizophrenic culture fails to comply fully with the realms of speech and language. Such a culture, like the schizophrenic, is rootless, separated from history and outside of “human time” (Jameson, “Postmodernism” 119), leading to Depthlessness.

It is quite interesting to know how the schizophrenic characters in the postmodern world retain their agency and identity and how art, literature, and cinema continue using the schizophrenic mode of knowledge to express schizophrenic themes. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) defines schizophrenia as: “Schizophrenia is a chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. People with schizophrenia may seem like they have lost touch with reality. Although schizophrenia is not as common as other mental disorders, the symptoms can be very disabling.” The symptoms of schizophrenia fall into three categories: positive, negative, and cognitive.

Individuals with schizophrenia are unable to comprehend their perpetually changing emotions; resulting in a problem where they find it difficult to identify, recognise, and verbalise their emotions and also find it difficult to understand the emotions of others.

Another aspect of Jamesonian philosophy that is taken up for analysis in the film is what Jameson calls ‘Depthlessness’. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic*



*of Late Capitalism* Jameson opines that people are inundated with the excess of information and technology has grabbed the central place in an individual's life (67). Our understanding of life has distorted, and the real is replaced by the imitation of the real. Jameson suggests that postmodernity converts all art forms into commodities as the postmodern cultural trends and practices were a mere reflection of new forms of capitalism exhibited by deeper economic structures (88). Jameson theorised the New Depthlessness as a rejection of five models of signification; which are interrelated, yet distinct. The first model is the model of appearance and essence, in which everything material that appears is termed to be the existence of Providence/ Will. The second model is known to be the model of authenticity or inauthenticity, whereby behaviour reflects self. The third model is the model of inside and outside, where inward feelings are believed to be manifested by facial/ bodily expressions. The next one is the model of manifest and latent, in which one's bodily gestures are perceived to be the symptoms his/her psychological state and finally the model of signifier and signified in which a sign is interpreted as the manifestation of a mental concept. Hans Bertens defines it as: "Postmodern, then, is depthless; it offers a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense. This lack of depth is perhaps postmodernism's 'supreme formal feature' and is intimately connected with the 'waning of the affect' in postmodern culture" (166).

As per Jameson, it is depthlessness that forms the basis for postmodern consumer culture. Due to this consumer culture, we become no more than the sum total of our purchases. Jameson advises to reject the late capitalist consumer culture and to try to generate a postmodern vision of critique that resists this Depthlessness. This Depthlessness is of course supported by a whole new technology (computers, digital culture, etc.). It manifests itself through literal flatness (flat skyscrapers full of reflecting windows, two-dimensional screens) and also through qualitative superficiality. In philosophy, it manifests itself through the postmodern belief that one can ever fully move beyond 'false consciousnesses' or the surface appearance of the ideology to some deeper truth. What we are left with, rather, are multiple surfaces. Jameson opines that one result is "that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (16). Ihab Hasan, a

prominent postmodern critic has theorised the idea of postmodernity. Defining depthlessness, he states:

Postmodernism vacates the traditional self, simulating self-effacement—a fake flatness, without inside/outside its opposite, self-multiplication, self-reflection. Critics have noted the "loss of self" in modern literature, but it was originally Nietzsche who declared the "subject" "only a fiction": "the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all. Thus postmodernism suppresses or disperses and sometimes tries to recover the "deep" romantic ego, which remains under dire suspicion in post-structuralist circles as a "totalizing principle." Losing itself in the play of language, in the differences from which reality is plurally made, the self impersonates its absence even as death stalks its games. It diffuses itself in depthless styles, refusing, eluding, and interpretation. (505)

As stated earlier, Jameson underscored the break with modernism, claiming that postmodern culture collapses the boundary between high culture and 'low' mass culture while displaying a 'New Depthlessness' involving Pastiche instead of Parody, resists interpretation. It also ruptures narratives and subjects in a Schizophrenic dispersal of fragments. Jameson suggests that a modern painting invites interpretation, a hermeneutic knowledge of the world beyond what is represented. While, on the contrary, what you see is what you get as no hermeneutic relations will be developed with the representation. Jameson opines that if at all any cultural document is "not to sink to the level of sheer decoration, it requires us to reconstruct us some initial situation out of which finished work emerged." And if so is not the case, the work of art "will remain an inert object, a reified end product impossible to grasp as a (socially) symbolic act in its own right" (7). This, for Jameson, is a kind of superficiality that is new; which he calls, 'New Depthlessness'. This view of Jameson is illustrated through two thematically related works. Vincent Van Gogh's celebrated work *A Pair of Shoes* representing high modernism, "the whole object world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty, and the whole rudimentary world of backbreaking peasant toil, a world reduced to its most brutal and menaced, primitive

and marginalised state” (7). The work is in stark contrast to the typical postmodern painting of Andy Warhol *Diamond Dust Shoes*. Jameson states that:

a random collection of dead objects hanging together on the canvas like so many turnips, as shorn of their earlier life-world as the pile of shoes left over from Auschwitz or the remainders and tokens of some incomprehensible and tragic figure in a packed dance hall. (8)

Jameson believes that *Diamond Dust Shoes* ‘do not speak to us’ as different associations are possible when looking at Warhol’s work. Nothing in the postmodern works essentially requires a hermeneutic step.

The theory of the dissolution of the self is critical to Jameson’s description of pastiche, which appears when the personal style is no longer available. Pastiche is categorised differently from parody, which tends to satirise eccentric personal style in the secure knowledge that some ‘normal’ style exists. Pastiche is free from humour and simply collects and codes dead styles. Personal style was celebrated in high modernism; postmodernism simply eliminates it, leaving new artists to imitate dead styles in a process called historicism. Here, the style becomes a code of images, and in late capitalist culture, images dominate the markets. Pastiche has also been referred to be an empty parody without depth. It is assumed that once the subjectivity of the artist becomes fragmented, there is nothing for him or her to do but to point to the past. Pastiche can conveniently become merely a collage of copied aesthetic forms from the past that has no new meaning attached. This is what Jameson calls cannibalization of past aesthetics, creating a ‘loss of historicalness’ as the past is represented as a shiny mirage of pop images produced by pop culture, also called pop history. Like the past, as a referent is erased in postmodern culture, it leaves nothing but texts. These images of the past are often arranged as ‘nostalgia films’, projecting pastiche onto a collective and social level, also desperately trying to recreate lost and desirable past. It’s interesting to note that nostalgia films invariably avoid representing the past itself, in favour of a certain style that is accepted as a representative of the past. In nostalgia, film images evoke the past, and filmmakers are careful to avoid any contemporary references. Thus, this type of artificial nostalgia which has been evoked by stereotypical images demonstrates how we are increasingly growing to be incapable of representing our own current experiences, and rely on stereotypes and signs.

Jameson locates another difference between high or late modernism and postmodernism what he calls waning of affect. Modern paintings with human figures usually reflect human expression, revealing their inner expression. He cites the example of Edvard Munch's *The Scream* epitomising the modern experiences of alienation and anxiety. Contrary to that, in postmodern art, feelings wane. When we look at a postmodern work of art, we can hardly speak of any expression, and that is because postmodernism rejects traditional models of depth, for example, models of conscious and unconscious or the models of authentic and unauthentic. It is through a process in which the subject has lost his active ability to create a sense of continuity between past and future that Jameson proceeds to describe the waning of affect. Such a subject cannot organise his temporal existence in one coherent experience.

Attributed to be a niche between pure Hindi commercial and art cinema, *Chandni Bar* retells the favourite theme of Madhur Bhandarkar; the tragedy of its characters, particularly female characters striving to break free from their doomed fate. The cinema produced by Bhandarkar is impacted by and associated with coarse realism. He is one of the few contemporary filmmakers who have been appreciated for raising the real-time issues in their films. Recipient of many National Film Awards, Bhandarkar's films highlight many unorthodox and contemporary themes like women as a target of crime, the theme of the underworld, the vicious circle of poverty, police and government corruption, nexus of celebrities and journalists, and the callousness of corporate houses. Majority of his films have females playing the lead role. Tabu received National Award for the Best Actress for *Chandni Bar* for the excellent portrayal of Mumtaz.

Female leads in Bhandarkar's films are the women of grit and determination, who lead their lives on their own terms. They are rebellious, not conforming to societal norms, and are very ambitious professionally. Few exceptions are there like Mumtaz of *Chandni Bar*, who though is not a stereotypical Bhandarkar heroine, yet has grit and determination. The initial reels of his films characterise a positive portrayal of an independent leading lady. However, quite predictably, to bring about a twist in the story, there is a recession in the visible assertion of her personality by the protagonist, usually till the interval of the film. From this stage onwards, she gradually starts fitting into the parameters of society. Towards the end, she either

succeeds in her ventures or ends up being a victim of societal pressure. This, undoubtedly, is the subtle underpinning of the societal conditioning that the film critiques at the beginning. Bhandarkar's *Satta* (2003) narrates the tale of Anuradha, who unknowingly and unwillingly falls into the muddy world of politics. Anuradha is basically a middle-class working woman, who did not have many high aspirations about her life. As the movie begins, Anuradha gives up on her profession after her marriage, though she is an educated and working woman. This act of hers counter-questions the very rationale of women empowerment. Nishigandha Dasgupta (Bipasha Basu), in another of Bhandarkar's movie *Corporate* (2006), is a successful corporate executive. Nishigandha wishes to project her lover to be a successful and independent man in front of the people of the company he is working for. She compromises with her dignity and does not hesitate to prepare a false report that her lover presents to be his. This act of hers is very unlike Nishigandha, who otherwise is a very feisty and motivated woman. Love makes her mind go unreasonable and she does not intend to clear the allegations of corrupt practices levelled against her. Despite being an intelligent and successful businesswoman, unfortunately, Nishigandha falls prey to the unethical corporate tactics and selfish business scuffles, where all the characters except apart from her are devoid of any sense of morality.

Another prominent and critically acclaimed film by Bhandarkar, *Fashion* (2008) is analysed as a part of this research. Meghna is a girl from a relatively smaller town who lands into the world of showbiz with innumerable aspirations to fulfil. Meghna is a defiant spirit who overturns her parents' wishes to go for a 'regular' life who do not want her to become a model. In the murky world of fashion, she gets pregnant by Abhijit Sarin, who is already married. She wants to keep the child but fails. Facing innumerable obstacles, she successfully returns to the fashion world.

While Bhandarkar has always received appreciation for making films that keep women's issues in the centre stage, yet he does not project them to be larger than life personalities and puts them in a larger social framework. Though many of his characters are full of guts and defiance; they do not hold the liberty to transgress the allocated sphere of action. Bhandarkar directed other films including *Page 3* (2005), *Traffic Signal* (2007), *Chandni Bar* (2001), and *Jail* (2009) which highlight the deficiencies of his portrayal.

A Review of *Chandni Bar* in *Variety* states about the film:

A handsome entry in the Indian drama movie niche between pure Bollywood and indie art cinema, “Chandni Bar” confidently re-tells a favourite theme — the tragedy of characters doomed never to break free of their social caste. In this variation, the heroine is forced to work as a dancer in a beer bar where patrons fling bills at dancers strutting to pop tunes. Much less flamboyant and more realistic in sensibility than Bollywood films, its accessibility to Western viewers should enhance its desirability to specialty distributing partners. (“Chandni Bar”)

*Chandni Bar* is a dismal and gloomy portrayal of the harshness of the life Mumtaz faces in Bombay (now Mumbai) while working for a beer bar as a bar dancer. Her notorious profession causes ultimate doom and social inescapability for her and her children. She is forced to migrate to Mumbai owing to her parents’ death in communal riots in Sitapur (UP) in 1985. She is joined by her maternal uncle in this migration. Her plight is reflected in the initial few lines she utters while travelling to Bombay on a train:

Today I am leaving this city. The city in which I grew up with the love of my parents, but there is a very short distance between happiness and sorrows. I could understand this when I lost everything right before my eyes. People say it was a communal attack on Muslims in Indore. But for me, it was a communal clash between humanity and inhumanity.  
(“*Chandni Bar*” 00:02:54)

Her monologue continues setting the tone for the movie. Tabu, in a passionately developed performance, succeeds in bringing forth the emotions Mumtaz is carrying deep within. Her actions and acting do complete justice to the nuances of the character of Mumtaz. As the scene proceeds, elements of nostalgia keep coming across when Mumtaz talks to herself, “My mother wished that even after marriage, I shouldn’t go out of this city, so that I must always be near her, but what is left for me in this city, except a few sweet memories of the past?” (“*Chandni Bar*” 00:05:45). The last line of the dialogue is reflective of the devastating state of mind of Mumtaz. An immense amount of pain and agony that she was made to undergo because of the separation from her family and subsequently leaving her city behind has left an

indelible mark on her psyche. Her emotional schizophrenic self develops from this stage onwards and remains until the movie gets over. Her constant conflict with the external world and her inability to fit herself into the world around creates a sense of loss and anxiety within her.

The genesis of her emotional schizophrenic self can well be understood by the audience when they understand that Mumtaz's persona and background are in absolute contrast to the kind of cultural and social environment she has come from. There is an absolute split between her ideology, upbringing, and the profession she has been thrown into. At several instances in the film, specifically right after joining the Chandni Bar, one can observe that she is shy and reluctant to expose in front of the customers. The act is not as natural and automatic as for the other dancers of the bar. They all are well versed with the cultural conditioning of the place and hardly find anything unusual or objectionable with the profession. Mumtaz, on the contrary, finds herself to be unable to adapt to the filthy language and dirty environment of the bar and wishes to escape. She is constantly gripped by the clutches of her worldly need for monetary security and her inherent good self. There is a constant struggle between both that tears her apart.

The film spans around fifteen years from 1985 to 2000, a time frame when India witnessed landmark shifts in the erosion of old ideological beliefs, the advancement of media and technology, penetration of mass media in every household, high rate of economic growth, and deregulation; though the years followed by liberalisation are also blamed for poverty, inequality, and economic degradation. Postmodernism in India is conjoined with LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization). So the film's narrative in a relatively long span of fifteen years allows running parallel to liberalised, globalised, and postmodern India. It provides the film with sufficient opportunities and instances where the Pastiche, Depthlessness, and Schizophrenia can be explored.

New Depthlessness of the modern-day as Jameson had debated about in his theory of postmodernity is what Mumtaz confronts in her life full of struggle when she shifts her base to Bombay. Having arrived at Bombay, Mumtaz is forced to work as a bar dancer at the local Chandni Bar. Bombay, the financial capital of India, has a predominant representation in the film. Bombay is interwoven in the film's storyline

to a great extent. In popular perception, the city is believed to be full of opportunities though termed to be ruthless and mechanical at the same time. People arrive at Mumbai to search for a livelihood from every nook and corner of the country. Mumbai is the hub of commercial and financial activities in the country; and also a city of contrasts. It is bursting to its seams with the problems of population, air pollution, and in terms of space. The space constraints of the city created the need for towering skyscrapers; which stand with all their glory next to sprawling slums. Haute fashion and cuisine stand beside street food stalls and pavement fashion. The city boasts of world-renowned designer labels and brands to exquisitely made in India items. The city is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious. Jameson emphasised that with the late phase of capitalism, commercialisation would give way to shallow sentiments. Commoditisation would replace genuine sensibilities of the times. With glitter, glamour, and might, Mumbai is a world unto itself with the presence of underworld gangsters, criminals, and people belonging to all the strata from extremely poor to the richest of the country.

Dance bars represent a bleak picture of women at such places. In this regard, William Mazzarella states:

The famous dance bars of Mumbai were, aptly enough, closed down on Indian Independence Day (15 August 2015). In these establishments, also sometimes called beer bars, young women, many of them from the poorer hinterland of the state of Maharashtra and beyond, danced with varying degrees to the hit Hindi film song of the day. An almost exclusively male clientele sat drinking, sometimes gazing raptly at a favourite dancer, occasionally summoning one over to exchange currency notes for a few minutes of more exclusively directed attention. Every now and then, a male bar employee or a customer would step out in front of the stage and perform the 'money shower', a sudden and spectacular burst of small denomination bills, either in the general direction of the dancers or directly over the head of a chosen muse. ( 481)

The ban on the dance bars owes its cause to two premises which were essentially contradictory to each other. The first premise depicted the bar dancers as wrecking



middle-class homes as well as evil and immoral, running after easy money as well as corrupting the youth and amassing a fortune each night by misleading ‘innocent and gullible young men’ into sex and sleaze. The second premise stood opposite to the first one. It claimed that bars were places where the bar owners trafficked and sexually exploited the girls for commercial gains and these places were nothing more than brothels. This premise refused to grant an agency to the women dancers. Rather, both these populist premises appealed the conservative morality of the society. The ban was lifted in January 2019 (Barangarwala).

In the film, prominence has been given to the representatives of industry, politics, police, and gangsters who run a parallel power game in Bombay. By incorporating the characters of all of these professions, the film intends to convey the notion that the majority of the men in such societies are abusers, willing to make compromise on the dignity and honour of the women who belong to them. Iqbal, Mumtaz’s relative, says in this regard, “Uncle, never believe anyone in Bombay, understand? I am giving you a shanty to live in for friendship. Damn it! We have to pay even to urinate in Bombay” (“*Chandni Bar*”00:07:58). The dialogue highlights the ruthlessness and depthlessness of a modern-day cosmopolitan city like Bombay. He is also quoted as saying “Bombay never puts anyone to sleep on an empty stomach” (“*Chandni Bar*” 00:08:50) indicating towards innumerable opportunities the city provides regardless of the dark shades it has.

Chandni Bar is run with a firm but not heavy hand by a man named Anna (Abhay Bhargav). This business of dancing provocatively for male strangers for a country girl of Islamic upbringing is shameful, but she comes to accept her position as the fresh merchandise enjoyably tutored in the finer points of beer bar performance by fellow dancer Deepa. Though there are a constant dispute and fight between the bar dancers for the prospective customers, yet they share intimate bonding behind the closed doors of the bar. Mumtaz has never perfectly well reconciled to her status of a dancer; nonetheless she is comforted and consoled in the company of these socially outcaste women. The bar becomes a kind of preferred substitute to a living space that otherwise bears no resemblance to a routine home. It is through the cracked glass window that the miserable reality of women’s lives comes to the forefront. They embody the pathetic sexual fantasies of customers on the bar’s tacky stage.

Mumtaz finds herself to be a misfit in the profession she has unwillingly landed herself into. She is a failure at the beginning as she lacks the moves and charm of an experienced and professional city dancer. She is naive and unexposed. The display of her body that she does in front of the strangers makes her uneasy and vulnerable. As mentioned in the brief candle, pioneer critic Laura Mulvey in her seminal work *Visual Pleasure and Narratives of Cinema* (1975) studied the problem of the female erotic in classic Hollywood cinema. Mulvey primarily believed that women are serving as the object of the male gaze and never the possessor of it. Women are objectified in a film because heterosexual men are in control of the camera. As per Mulvey, it is the patriarchal society that affects us deeply and also goes on to shape our cinematic experience. She proposes how our cinematic experiences are conformed. She argues how our culturally determined perceptions of gender are conformed by films. In a film, women are generally used to give men a gratifying visual experience which can be attained in two ways; 1. By identifying them with the represented character. 2. By objectifying women.

Undoubtedly, the 'gaze' in cinema is masculine. D.E. Russell in his essay *Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm* states, "The sexual objectification of female is...a staple of mainstream movies, ads, records, covers, songs, magazines, television, art cartoon, literature, pin-ups, and so on. It influences the way men learn to see women" (78). He establishes that 'gazer' is more demanding and selfish and wants 'gazed' to act according to his expectations. Jonathan Schroeder states, "To gaze implies more than to look; as it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which gazer is superior to the object of the gaze" (56). Schroeder associates power with gaze and puts forwards the idea that gazing is not simply looking at; rather, it is inherently a power exercise where gazer controls more power than gazed.

Mumtaz's profession itself is based on the idea of gaze where she has to perform and entice the customers by wearing revealing clothes. Potya (Atul Kulkarni), a local gang leader, is drawn to Mumtaz's dancing. He stabs her uncle for having molested her and forcing her into this profession for their survival. The very next moment, he puts forth an alternative for her; to go back and marry him. Having no other better alternative, she avails the opportunity to the life of stability, status, and happiness; moreover her permanent goodbye to the suffocating world of bar dancing.

This is perhaps only a brief happy phase in Mumtaz's life since the time she has come to Bombay. Prior to this and after this, her life has been a tale of unfathomable misery and woes. Potya loves Mumtaz but being a patriarchal male dominates her and does not provide her equal plane for a healthy relationship. Surrounded by her criminal friends and round the clock underworld career, Potya naturally neglects her. Circumstances spoil their personal lives. She sticks up with household duties and rearing children, while he remains busy with the gritty outside world. She remains indebted to Potya for saving her life as she had brought her back from sleaze and prostitution.

Mumtaz is caught in a no-win situation and a perpetual emotional schizophrenic state. Apparently, she is a much-married happy woman, but internally, she is walking on the sword's edge as she has a constant lingering fear of harm to Potya's life. Any threat to Potya's life would automatically mean instability and uncertainty about the future of Abhay and Payal, whom she is extremely concerned about. Mumtaz observes that Potya is arrogant with his friends. He has a sense of power and superiority in him that eventually spells his doom. The conversation between Potya and Mumtaz follows:

Potya: She laughs just like you.

Mumtaz: And he's absolutely stubborn like you...after the entire morning's effort, now he's drinking milk.

Potya: And he'll be like me...very brave.

Mumtaz: I don't want him to be rowdy...I'll educate him & make him a big man.

Potya: A big man? Am I not a big man?" (*Chandni Bar* 01:30:46)

Potya has a high temperament and he is very impulsive. "When Potya was enraged, he shunned discretion and the inevitable happened. In spite of being restrained by Habib Brother & Uma Shankar and the danger from the Police looming, he didn't bother and he killed informer Munia" (*Chandni Bar* 01:23:40).

Mumtaz is concerned about the well being of Potya and constantly frets about his life. When Potya is captured by the police, she leaves no stone unturned for his release and reaches out to every possible help that she can have. In such circumstances, her children were her pillar of strength. She derives positivity and

strength from her children and inspires them to do well in their lives. In her monologue, Mumtaz says, “When Potya didn't return, till late in the nights, I used to have nightmares. Then I used to lean on Abhay. I had only one wish that I should bring up Abhay very nicely, educate him and make him a decent person” (“*Chandni Bar*” 01:22:19).

Potya is killed by the police in a fake encounter due to the murder of their informer and also for being rude, dashing, and thoughtless. Though shaken to the core, Mumtaz musters up her courage and prepares herself for another ordeal in her life. She runs from pillar to post, but things have changed since the death of Potya. People, who swore by Potya's friendship, have turned their backs to Mumtaz's pleas. She is shabbily treated at the hands of those so-called friends of Potya. Friendships are reflective of modern-day Depthlessness in the conversation between Uma Shankar, one of the confidants of Potya and Mumtaz, when she approaches him for some help:

Mumtaz: Uma Brother, I was thinking of starting some work. Now Potya is also not there, I was thinking of running 2- 3 auto-rickshaws. With their hire, I can meet my expenses.

Uma: Then, what should I do?

Mumtaz: I need money, Uma Brother.

Uma: Money, to you? On what guarantee? Suppose you run away with it.

Mumtaz: I don't want a loan, Potya had loaned some money to you, that.

Uma: Have you gone mad? A riff-raff like Potya will give a loan to a person like Uma Shankar? (“*Chandni Bar*” 01:40:40)

The rearing up of her children becomes Mumtaz's pivotal concern, though the controversial life of her husband proves it difficult for her to be a mother respected by society. Mumtaz discovers that her profession and her husband's disrepute and infamy prevent anyone from regarding her or trusting her words. She utters, “I had decided that my children will not go Potya's way” (“*Chandni Bar*” 01:24:06).

However, Mumtaz is adamant to ensure that her children Abhay (Vishal Thakkar) and Payal (Minakshi Sahani) manage to attain a respectable position in

society for themselves, but they do not. Mumtaz's prior history of being a dancer at the bar and societal pressure due to her husband's occupation let her have no respite. Anna, her boss at Chandni Bar and one of the few genuine males Mumtaz encounters at Mumbai, warns her about trying to transgress the class boundaries. He advises her that there is no way back to the certainties of village life or to a life of approval and validity. But Mumtaz is carried away by intense motherly feeling and declines to pay heed to any hint around.

A dancing girl, early in the film when Mumtaz had just joined Chandni Bar, is told by her pimp husband "Don't give me the mother India bullshit; the bitch wants to be a mother" ("*Chandni Bar*" 00:21:45), hinting at the deplorable condition of these dancing girls. Somehow, facing the odds, Mumtaz survives her illusion remaining intact until the year 2000. At this juncture, she faces intense emotional schizophrenia, when her son is fifteen years old and her daughter is thirteen years old. As fate would have it, Abhay is slapped with a case of extortion by the police and sent into custody where he is raped by two juveniles. The police have not forgiven his father, Potya for killing one of their informers, although Abhay is innocent. Leaving no stone unturned to save her son; Mumtaz has to raise seventy thousand rupees to bribe the police; one-third of which is beyond her capacity. Compromising with her dignity and pride, she sleeps with one of her customers in order to get the money, while her daughter Payal manages the difference by selling herself at Chandni Bar. These events extremely traumatise Abhay. He guns down his rapists as his mother watches. After killings and still the gun in his hand, he walks away quietly. Mumtaz gives a long unbroken cry of death, which sounds like a primal scream. Abhay becomes his father Potya; Payal, her mother Mumtaz, the dancing girl of Chandni Bar.

As mentioned earlier, *Chandni Bar* is a fine specimen for analysis of pastiche incorporated in a film. Film's long span and time frame allow a major shift in the narrative and changes in the setup, dressing, language, and the backdrop. Usually, pastiche is compared with parody. Parody is based on a belief in a norm, but when there is no belief in 'normal language' as in postmodernism, art becomes fragmented and privatised with each group of the artist speaking in a private language called 'theory' of art or art commenting upon art. Pastiche is termed to speak the dead

language and is supposedly neutral. The film is marked by several references to the earlier Hindi films. One of the most striking examples of Pastiche in the film is song and dance sequences, composed of a collage of earlier styles of dance music and choreography. Pastiche is thus used as a lens to focus on the presences and presentations of the past in the present.

Ingeborg Hoesterey propagates that pastiche is a quasi-homage to and assimilation of a great master (4). This element of homage is what sets pastiche apart from parody. It is often this element that is employed in the discourse of Hindi filmmakers as they choreograph their spectacular imitation of the past. Referring to intertextuality in Hindi films, Usha Iyer states:

In much of their memorializing of particular filmic styles and iconography, Bollywood song and dance sequences manufacture the past as an episodic narrative. This construction of the past through selective and strategic remembering in the present leads to the trope of the past as a succession of the definable decades. In representing the past of the Hindi cinema as consisting, for example, jazz-inspired the 50s, the twist obsessed 60s, the disco dancing 80s, Bollywood fetishises the star body, sets props and costumes in a bric-a-brac collection of aestheticized fragments. (209)

*Chandni Bar* makes unambiguous efforts at pragmatism and serves as an anti-typical Hindi film, though it incorporates some of the dramatic notes of the well-known old films, particularly in its dance and song sequences. Most remarkably, the film has no original song sequences: few old songs play in the soundtrack in bits and pieces, but otherwise, the film borrows the song tracks from other old films that form the milieu for the bar girls' rather listless dances in front of the customers. As if to make it stand apart from the traditional films, old and popular Hindi films and their stars are regularly referred to, a representation of glitzy and glamorous world away from the grim reality of these bar dancers.

When Mumtaz enters the dance bar for the first time, the song playing at the Bar is *Mungda* from *Inkaar* released in 1977. Subsequently, in order to show the progression and transition of time, different songs of recent years are played, including *Apni Prem Kahaniyan* (*Mera Gaon Mera Desh*, 1971), *Laila O Laila*

(*Qurbaani*, 1980), *Naino Mein Sapna* (Himmatwala, 1983). When Mumtaz becomes proficient and comfortable in her profession, she performs on the songs like *Dilbar Dil Se Pyaare* (*Caarvan*, 1971). Having gone through immense troubles and tribulations when Mumtaz joins Dance bar again, she performs on songs like *Hawa Hawa* (Artist: Hassan Jahangir 1989). Towards the end of the film, Payal, daughter of Mumtaz, in order to save her brother from the clutches of law and police, sells herself at Chandni Bar. While she enters the bar, the song playing at the back is *Nimbuda* (*Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, 1999), the most contemporary of the songs of the time. Another contemporary song played at the bar is *Maine Payal Hai Chhankai* by Falguni Pathak. The costumes of the dancers also undergo changes as per the time frame. Though the dresses remain traditional in look, yet there is a regular and perpetual change in the costumes from the year 1985 to the year 2000. Dancers imitate the mannerism and bodily gestures of the film actresses on whose songs they dance. The whole ambiance and environment of the dance bars are in stark contrast to the harsh outside world. Dance bars provide temporary relief and stress-free environment to the patrons, who see themselves as the heroes and the dancers as the heroines of the films.

In a review of *Chandni Bar* titled *Indian Cinema* by University of Iowa, the reviewer assesses the character of Mumtaz by saying:

Despite her futile attempts to preserve her honor and to protect her children, Mumtaz remains a frustratingly passive character, and although the film clearly wishes to engage the audience's sympathy for her plight, the suggestion that she is not to blame for, yet completely unable to direct her fate, creates a general situation without any apparent solution. The popular Tabu deserves credit for taking on an unconventional role and playing it realistically, and the directors deserve it for even making a film that focuses on a heroine — but for all that, Mumtaz is often a blank slate, her only strong emotion being anguish when the cruel world persistently abuses her. Whether or not the film's bleak conclusion seems honestly realistic or an easy way to avoid the film's social problems will be up to individual viewers.

(“Chandni Bar”)

Power and intensity lay in the core of the film, which remains unrelieved until even after the film gets over. The narrative of the film is uncompromising and lacks any subplot as such. A catharsis is felt by the viewers after having undergone the experience of watching the film. The film is a powerful commentary over the abuse of women's bodies and their subjugation by the patriarchal powers. In the film, the dancers share solidarity, but the utility of this solidarity is negligible as their combined power is ineffective against the combined powers of police, underworld, and other organised institutions dominated by males. The discourse that the film focuses on is common narrative in the Indian psyche that the 'immoral' women cannot gain respectability and that a dancing girl can never be a respectable wife; she is always a concubine, a courtesan, and her children too should follow in the footsteps of their mother.

Mumtaz's life as a victim of societal atrocities and her subsequent struggle is indicative of her inner craving for a better life for her children and herself. Her entire life has been a narrative of exceptional woes and tragedies, her face carrying a perpetual expression of anguish. Critics, as mentioned above, claim that her struggle did not fetch her any positive output. But Mumtaz indeed classifies as a New Woman as her struggle is not only relevant but inspirational also, though she does not attain much in the worldly sense towards the end of the film. Mumtaz always aspired and strove for a life that will be more 'normal'. The kind of life she had seen her parents leading in her native city. Mumtaz was never cut for the life of a dance bar. Unlike most of the other bar dancers, who were familiar with the language, culture, and ambience of the place, Mumtaz had been virtually thrown into this unfamiliar and uncomfortable surrounding. Though she gradually forms an affinity with the place and the fellow dancers, at the first opportunity she escapes looking for a better life for herself. It was her misfortune that this 'new happy domestic life' was short-lived for her. Yet, as a wife and as a mother, she did best what she could do to save her children from the adversities. But as the luck would have it, she could not do much despite her sincerest of the efforts. A New Woman does not necessarily succeed in all her endeavours. What matters more and qualifies her to be a New Woman is the essence of justice and standing for what is right, that Mumtaz has in her.



## Chapter 5

### **Foucauldian Feminism and Jamesonian Schizophrenia: Contesting Bodies, Sexuality, and Identity in *Fashion***

*Fashion* (2008), a critically and commercially acclaimed film by Madhur Bhandarkar, received two National Film Awards for Priyanka Chopra (Best Actress) and Kangana Ranaut (Best Supporting Actress). The film is a typical specimen of postmodern sensibilities where consumer culture reigns supreme. Analysis of the movie reveals that the result of socio-economic changes resulting from postmodern conditions has led to better opportunities and acceptability for women about their choices and preferences. Female gender, historically speaking, has always stood marginalised from society, but things are gradually changing. In developed countries and developing countries, firms are now increasingly focusing on formulating mature policies to address the issue of gender inequality, equal remuneration, and address of sexual and emotional harassment.

The film is based on the life of a conventionally speaking good girl Meghna in a 'dreadful' world of fashion. It is a narrative that highlights how a girl from a relatively small city enters the world of showbiz with the dreams in her eyes. She challenges the authority of her father to fulfil the ambition of being a supermodel. She is expected to abide by the societal norms which advise her to cover her body, get married and lead a 'decent, dignified' life. Two other models, Shonali and Janet, are indispensable to the narrative of the story. They deliver; if not equally important, but quite important roles as fashion models. The film puts in the forefront the issues women in the fashion world encounter. Meghna is projected to be a diligent professional, resolute to create a world for herself in the fashion industry but finds it immensely difficult to make and sustain her position. She, nonetheless, succeeds in claiming her position and re-establishes herself to be the New Woman of the era.

For the analysis, Michel Foucault's Theory of Sexuality and Fredric Jameson's Emotional Schizophrenia and New Depthlessness are applied for a comprehensive understanding of the primary characters. These ideas are relevant for the investigation of the subjects because these are the predominant concepts forming the undercurrent of the narrative. In this chapter, the focus is on the implications of

particular tensions around power, identity, body, schizophrenic mind, and depthlessness between postmodernism and the relevant ideas of Jameson and Foucault.

Meghna (Priyanka Chopra) is an ambitious and aspiring model who wants to shift her base from Chandigarh to Mumbai for better opportunities in the field of fashion and modelling. She aspires to become a supermodel. As her father is against her wish to join the fashion industry and wishes for a 'decent' profession for her. Going against the wishes of her father and smitten by her ambition, Meghna hesitates only for a while before leaving her home and moving to Mumbai to find success in the modelling world. Paving her way through model coordinators, talent managers, portfolio photographers, fashion designers, business magnates, and media moguls, she finally she establishes herself as a much sought after model on the ramp. In Mumbai, she chances to meet her college friend Rohit (Ashwin Mushran) who is working as an assistant designer for a prominent designer Vinay Khosla (Harsh Chhaya). While in Mumbai, Meghna meets another struggling actor who becomes her friend, Maanav (Arjan Bajwa). They meet on numerous occasions as she auditions several times and gets rejected every time.

Meghna is highly inspired by Shonali (Kangna Ranaut) and dreams of attaining success like her someday. She meets Shonali at a show by Rahul Arora (Samir Soni) and gets ridiculed by Christina, the show's choreographer. Christina tells Meghna to get a better portfolio done by ace photographer Kartik (Rahul Roy). In order to afford his fee, Meghna unwillingly consents to be a model for a lingerie brand, where she is mentored by Janet (Mugdha Godse) during the shoot. She starts living in Maanav's apartment after leaving her relative's residence after her lingerie shoot. To her luck, Meghna is incidentally seen by Anisha played by Kitu Gidwani, an official at a premier modelling agency. Meghna is introduced to Abhijit Sarin (Arbaaz Khan), one of Anisha's senior. Meghna's ambitious nature and high level of confidence impress Abhijit. Meghna replaces Shonali as the top model of Panache after the latter's drug abuse becomes troublesome.

Endowed with beauty and talent, Meghna tastes overnight success. Her commitments and busy schedule compel her to terminate her relationship with Maanav who is still a struggling model. Subsequently, Meghna involves herself in a

relationship with Abhijit. Janet marries Rahul despite knowing about his sexual orientation. Gradually, Shonali's drug abuse starts affecting her health and professional commitments, and she is forced to join a rehabilitation centre. Meghna, on the other hand, is unable to handle her success with maturity and humility. She starts losing her well-wishers due to her high headedness and arrogance. She soon realises that she has become pregnant while being in a relationship with Abhijit, who referring to the clauses in the contract, indirectly forces her to abort the child. Meghna realises that she has been betrayed in the relationship and reveals the secret to Abhijit's wife. Consequently, Meghna's contract with Panache comes to termination. These turns of events upset Meghna immensely, and she involves in all the 'immoral' activities like alcoholism, attending rave parties, using cocaine, and having a one night stand with a stranger. Having been back to her senses, she feels dejected and decides about returning to Chandigarh.

Utterly devastated, Meghna spends a year in her native city with her parents. Gradually, her father helps in coming out of depression and tries to ignite self-confidence in her. He motivates her to return to Mumbai which she agrees to. Meghna by now has clearly understood that arrogance causes the premature death of success. She realises that some attitude was required for the success at the ramp, but with success, her attitude had upgraded to being arrogant. This arrogance had her sliding down the slope of success she had conquered after hard work and struggle. After having lost almost everything, it was nearly impossible for Meghna to recuperate. But she is an ambitious girl who would not give up so easily. Meghna revives her friendship with Janet and walks the ramp again for Rohit's show. Walking the ramp after so long and looking at the glares of the camera, she freezes. In her quest to look out for people who had been her pillars of strength in her struggling days, she approaches Maanav (now a successful model), who is engaged.

Meanwhile, Shonali has lost her sanity and is shown on TV as a homeless alcoholic and druggist. A reformed Meghna empathises with her, takes her along and makes attempts for her rehabilitation. She also receives an offer from Rahul to be a showstopper in his major show that could give her international recognition. Suddenly a night the show, Shonali vanishes. As the walk on the ramp is about to begin, Meghna is informed about the death of Shonali by the police. The cause of death is

stated to be the drug overdose. Though immensely disturbed from inside, Meghna, bound by professional commitment overcomes the pain and by walking the ramp, revives her career and restores her lost confidence. The final scene shows Meghna walking the ramp in Paris.

The film was declared a winner at several award ceremonies including seven nominations at the 54<sup>th</sup> Filmfare Awards. At the 56<sup>th</sup> National Film Awards, the film bagged Best Actress Award and the Best Supporting Actress Award. The movie was stated to be “One of the best women-centric films of Bollywood” (Bhattacharya). In an interview with CNN-IBN in 2006, director of the film, Madhur Bhandarkar is quoted as stating that he aspired to highlight the life of fashion models through a film (Sengupta). Bhandarkar stated that the Hindi films had, by and large, overlooked the issues concerning the lives of fashion models and he intended to pierce through the boundary since he was very much infatuated with the fashion industry. He had always been inquisitive about the lives of the models, inside and outside the ramp walks. In another interview, when asked if his film was a critical take on fashion fraternity, Bhandarkar states:

This is a gross misconception doing the rounds. *Fashion* is not about the fashion technicalities in terms of the summer-autumn couture collections. It is not even about fashion industry politics. The fashion industry is just the backdrop. *Fashion* is an emotional saga, the journey of all the people that make up the modelling world-the designers, the models and everyone associated with the fashion fraternity. A segment of the film will showcase cut-throat competition between models.  
(Bhandarkar)

*Fashion*, on the contrary, is a women-centric film, aimed to bring forth the intricacies of the life of women leading dual lives. Fashion models’ lives have always been termed to be intriguing and mysterious behind the ramp, hence Bhandarkar, in order to bring forth the reality and myths surrounding the lives of these fashion models chose the theme of fashion. In order to impart authenticity to his film, Bhandarkar attended several fashion shows, conducted interviews of the models, and did extensive research on the fashion industry for approximately eight months (Chaudhary). Many media houses hypothesised about the film being based on the life

of models like Geetanjali Nagpal, Shivani Kapoor, and Alicia Raut, but Bhandarkar denies the association. He asserts that the film is based on fictional characters and there is a disclaimer tag in the opening shot of his films (Lalwani). The characters and situations in Bhandarkar's films are influenced if not aped completely, from real life and paradoxically, this film is one of the most original imitations in the industry. There are revelations on the glamour world which are distinctive Bhandarkar brand like how aspiring models get paid for being eye-candy at elite events or how eminent designers tag their labels on apparel bought from cheap markets abroad to pass-off as their own creations. It was also alleged that the film is based on two gay fashion designers, but Bhandarkar denies that as well, saying female models form the theme of the film, not the male models (Bhandarkar).

Kirti Verma states that “The film shows every bit about the life of models and brings the inside secrets of the fashion industry. It has everything- fashion weeks, casting couch, drugs, abuses, gay designers, bitching.” However, in an interview with Aroonim Bhuyan, Bhandarkar states that the film is “not about the fashion industry as such. It only has fashion as a backdrop. The film is more about the story of models, designers, and people. And it is on the aspects like the personal story, the individual story, their ups and downs, and their journey that I tried to capture” (Bhandarkar). The film explores the issues of drugs, homosexuality, and sexual exploitation of the model in the name of granting work.

Bhandarkar is renowned for making women-centric films and after three of his previous films, including *Chandni Bar* (2001), *Page 3* (2005), and *Corporate* (2006), *Fashion* is the fourth film to earn critical praise and commercial success for the depiction of strong and independent women characters. *Fashion* being a representative of the modern-day intricacies involved in the world of fashion and the treatment of women in the profession is an apt specimen for the analysis. It has generally been believed that the fashion industry is a difficult domain to tread. Abuse of models is an open secret, though very few cases are reported. The field of fashion is extremely competitive as the ambitious and talented aspirants from across the country are drawn to fashion careers, creating a saturation point in the market. The glamour quotient involved in the fashion world appeals to outgoing, bold, ambitious, and confident people who are fond of attracting attention and being under the

limelight. A mix of such personalities enhances competitiveness. Also, it is perceived that the models earn high salaries and lead glamorous lives drawing people to the fashion industry. General presumption about the fashion industry has been that here successful models are sad, lonely, and broken people who are addicted to substance abuse. The leading and authoritative figures of the industry, usually males, are cruel, manipulative, and exploitative. These notions are true to quite an extent though very subjective and open to interrogation. Mercifully, *Fashion* transcends these clichés and narrates a poignant account of women who struggle to uphold their pride, identity, and dignity in a milieu that stinks of grime behind the outer glamour. The film gives an insight into the dark recesses of the lives of two lead characters while trying to lay bare their strengths and weaknesses; their fears and hopes; their dreams and nightmares.

Meghna being an ambitious girl cannot resist her inner call of moving to Mumbai. Though Chandigarh is not really a small town, yet it in no way can provide a kind of exposure and platform Mumbai can. Meghna defying her parents' advice shifts her base to Mumbai. She has big dreams to fulfil. She is also the narrator of the film and as the film begins, she states:

Dreams are sold differently in different cities. Because the city and its monotonous life need the vision and colour of a beautiful dream to make itself big. In a city like this, with a dream of becoming an international supermodel, I, Meghna Mathur dreamt and lived. The only difference was that my dream was bigger than the city.  
(*"Fashion"* 00:00:30)

Mumbai has a higher concentration of jobs and opportunities, leading to intense competition. As the city has limited scope for further geographical expansion, hence there are a higher number of competitors in a small area, intensifying the aggressive atmosphere of the industry. Meghna is a postmodern girl as she has the element of rebelliousness in her that was absent or highly scarce in the girls of previous generations. Meghna is an immensely confident girl, a prerequisite to succeed in the industry. When she meets Abhijit in his office for work, she says: "Like thousands of girls...I too want to be a successful model. But there is a small difference; I am better than the rest" (*"Fashion"* 00:34:18).

But working in the fashion industry has never been a cakewalk. Several studies conducted about the field have shown that the exploitation of models is rampant in the fashion industry, which leads to traumatising experiences, emotional schizophrenia, insecurity, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and overall sense of depthlessness in their lives. Indeed the models earn huge amount of money, get to wear most exquisite dresses from exclusive designers and have a career which allows them to travel across the globe. But at times, the reality is contrary to what it seems to be from outside. From emotional to physical abuse to backstabbing to discrimination, models are treated in many unimaginable ways. Zainab Salbi, in her analysis of the lives of fashion models, writes:

Fashion models are presented to the world as the perfect images of beauty and glamour, the very standard to which every woman should aspire. What is far lesser known is the dark world that underlines that portrait of seeming perfection. Behind the scenes, the modelling world is crawling with sexual, financial and emotional abuse, the type that can permanently alter a person's life for the worst. (Salbi)

In Zainab's opinion, it will be very pertinent to enquire about the projected images being fed by the modelling and fashion world; the images of ideal beauty and bodily perfection. These images often overlook the abuse and exploitation of young women who are usually too afraid to register their resistance. It is impossible to guess frequency of the assaults on models by people as so few are reported, partly for the usual reason assaults often go unreported (a sense of shame on woman's part), but also because of some factors specific to the fashion industry; models are often very young; they fear they would not work again if they create trouble for higher-ups. Wearing bright makeup, high heels, and glittery clothes, models sashay down the ramp. Until the lights are on, they look perfect and their lives presumed to be as glamorous off the stage as on it. Behind the glistening faces sparkling under the spotlight, the models have struggles similar to other professions.

A book penned by Manjima Bhattacharjya, *Mannequin: Working Women in India's Glamour Industry* (2018) explores her inquisitiveness about the world of fashion "What brought them to this field, what work they really did, how they negotiated public perception of who they were and how they felt about being seen as

‘objects’ (23). Bhattacharjya lists many cases where female models were taken advantage of financially and sexually when working in the Indian fashion industry. She highlights the need to address this problem and posits that respecting the work of fashion models is the first step. In a review of the book, Krithika Ramaswamy writes:

The myth of all models being alike is exploded in the chapter ‘The Fantasy Body’. Each medium –print, television, or ramp- requires a different body or face type. The chapter also explores the perils of cosmetic surgery; awareness of anorexia and bulimia; the growth of gyms in creating sculpted bodies and the whole issue of skin colour. Her account of what happens backstage at fashion weeks is riveting as is the tale of the short-lived union of models. In the chapter ‘Objectification and Commodification’ Bhattacharjya analyses the feminist protests against beauty pageants and how the younger generation of feminists see such shows. (Ramaswamy)

Fashion and modelling world is by and large a part of postmodernist consumer culture which Fredric Jameson has theorised about. Fundamentally, consumer culture is essentially viewed as the acquisition of common goods, but the problem arises when we witness consumerism exercising rigorous control over people’s lives in an unparalleled manner. The globalisation of commodities supplemented by enchanting advertising gave impetus to consumer culture in the late capitalist era. People in this era have an unquenchable thirst for the latest and best commodities. People are psychologically habituated by the mass media and advertising as they associate the perfect looking models, celebrities, and media icons with consumerism. The capitalist world is accused of creating ‘artificial needs of the people’ by identifying the products with flawless bodies of the models and celebrities.

Langston Rae, in his book *Sexual Solipsism*, states the theory of Immanuel Kant by which when an object or an individual is seen for one’s sexual satisfaction is called objectification. Furthermore, Rae states that due to this objectification, an individual is dehumanised and reduced to the status of being a thing (184). Radical feminists like Sandra Lee Bartky define sexual objectification as reducing a woman to her body parts, which serves as a drawback to the rest of her personality (40). Shaista Malik, in her article, discusses Martha Nussbaum’s comprehensive framework of



objectification, which comprises subjecting a person in any one or all of the ways stated below. This framework assists in understanding the modes of subversion, particularly in the fashion world through various means:

1. Instrumentality: if a person is treated as an instrument or tool to serve the purpose of the objectifier.
2. Denial of autonomy: if a person is treated as wanting in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Violability: if a person is treated as deficient in boundary-integrity.
4. Fungibility: when a person is treated as interchangeable with other things of the same sort of different type.
5. Ownership: if a person is treated as possessed by another person who can buy or sell him/her.
6. Denial of subjectivity: if a person is treated as an object whose feelings and emotions are not worth consideration.
7. Inertness: if a person is treated as deficient in agency and activity. (89-96)

*Fashion* reflects that independent, cultured, and so-called liberated women working for the popular media, particularly fashion and modelling, are treated as sex-objects. Most of the models constellate model coordinators or fashion agencies desperate to get work. Wendy Chapkis, a well known feminist media theorist, argues that modelling is indeed a well-paid profession, but the time span of this occupation is very short as it allows a model only eight to ten years of active career (89). Their facial looks and physical appeal are the determiners of their market value. Autonomy is required to make decisions and take bold steps to realise dreams in order to feel like an empowered person. Educated, independent, and liberated women in media, particularly the fashion world, have to part with their autonomy while working in the field. All three prominent characters of the movie, Meghna, Shonali, and Janet are educated and modernised women, yet they are nothing more than the puppets in the hands of people who decide for them. They are subjected to the will and decisions of the coordinators, photographer, owners of modelling agencies, and other allied members of the fashion fraternity in order to get work and retain their position of successful models. Those who resist are either labelled as defiant or ostracised by the fraternity.

Looking young and pretty is a fundamental prerequisite of the fashion industry, and for the purpose, models do not resist the surgical procedure also. Critics

like Naomi Woolf opine that though these procedures are claimed to be a wilful decision of the models, yet the practices in the fashion world force them to undergo such procedures. Models prove to be the easiest targets by the propagators of these procedures who lure them in the name of career progression. Patriarchal practices construct contradictory standards for males and females is the idea critic Susan Sontag believes in. The same culture which hardly shows any tolerance towards women who are intellectually mature and experienced; idolizes men's aging and matured face as their hard-earned experience (32-38). Angela Mc Robbie, while discussing the effect of consumer culture on teenage girls in mass media, states that under the garb of empowerment and emancipation popular consumerist culture has rather made them subservient and trapped. She states:

Seemingly supplanting feminism per se, and appearing to adopt the interests of girls and young women, commercial culture finds a license to speak on their behalf. Companies draw on the language of 'Girl Power' as though to bestow on their products a sense of dynamism, modernity, and innovation. Such post-feminist strategies allow for the expansion of the 'teen girl' global market on the basis of re-invention of the category of youthful womanhood, for whom freedom has now been won; or, in the case of developing countries, is in the process of being won. I want to suggest that this popular feminist appropriation permits more subtle modalities of gender re-inscription and re-subordination to be pursued. (533)

Progressing with the debate on sexuality and power/ body, it is apt to review the Foucault's interpretation of these concepts in his *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, originally published in French and subsequently translated into English in the year 1986. Foucault's notion of power in his discourse analysis is also central to the debate. Foucault, with his theories, has enabled feminists to look in new ways at the control of women, especially at their sexuality and their bodies. Sexual politics differs in its relation to women's experiences across the cultures and nations; although their respective issues and concerns have some common threads. So whether it is a poor, uneducated woman like Sanichari from *Rudaali*, as discussed in a previous chapter or

educated, affluent, and city-bred women like Shonali and Meghna; they all have certain central common experiences to their being.

Foucault is said to be undermining traditional feminism. While talking about gender and sexuality, he does not exclusively talk about female body and sexuality, rather imbibes all the ‘perverse’ sexual orientations like masturbation, hysterical woman, and the homosexual. Paula Sauko and Laura Reed write in this regard in their article titled *Governing the Female Bodies: The Three Dimensions of Power*:

Michel Foucault published the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, offering a highly original theory on the production of various “perverse” bodies such as the masturbating child, hysterical woman, and the homosexual. The book offered a detailed account of how what had previously been considered aberrant behaviours were constituted as specimens by the early modern sciences of psychiatry and sexology.

(1-2)

There has always been a focus on Foucault’s lack of interest in any specific gender per se, yet feminists have found few grounds for claiming that what Foucault says should be attended to. One of those grounds is that his approach to understanding power relations can offer feminists new and productive insights into viewing women’s relationships with each other and with men. Foucault has opened up a parallel but rather different theory of social construction and analysing present power relations while feminists have been developing theories of the social construction of gender, sexuality, and body. Foucault’s ideas on power, self, and sexuality, for example, are not compatible with feminist ideas in any simple or predictable way and have considerable problems in applying these ideas to any feministic interpretation. Foucault opines that body and sexuality are essentially cultural constructs rather than a natural phenomenon. Though majority of the feminist favour Foucault’s idea of relation between body and power to be quite enlightening; attention has also been brought to its drawbacks.

Foucault’s deconstruction of power as in patriarchy or capitalism led him to analyse ways in which power is created constantly. He certainly recognised domination, yet he emphasised that it is a mistake to study it as a system benefitting a particular group, rather proposed that people’s experience of subordination and

domination are ‘effects’ of power, not originating from a specific source. This startling view has opened up feminist’s eyes in understanding the power structure in a different light; this revelation also indicates a gulf between Foucault’s followers and feminist critics. Taking women’s vast and diverse experiences as a source of reference, however, is a very complex task. Feminism is very contradictory as the lives and experiences of women are diverse. This is the plea of postmodern feminists. Considering Foucault’s aim was to debate on how subjectivity is produced through power, his accounts are curiously gender-neutral. But feminists have found the ways to bridge the gap. Angela King, in her article *The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body* states:

How can Foucault analyse power relations, sexuality and the body without discussing gender? I suggest that the female body exemplifies Foucault’s arguments about discipline, yet it is conspicuous by its absence. Although this deeply problematises his work for feminists, I don’t believe it negates his entire conceptual framework. I regard it as more of an (admittedly offensive) lacuna that by definition, demands to be filled. It is in this spirit that I shall firstly explore why Foucault’s gender-blindness is so problematic, and then go on to make my case for reading the female body as a particular target of disciplinary power in order to argue that gender, specifically femininity, is a discipline that produces bodies and identities and operates as an effective form of social control. (30)

Foucault does not seem to be concerned about the gender of his subjects and the modality of their investment, training, and production of bodies. He also seems to be oblivious of the idea of how techniques and degrees of discipline are asserted on the body by a specific gender. Feminists are amused at the idea of how Foucault is capable of analysing the dynamics of power relations, body, and sexuality without being gender-specific. They cannot comprehend how the female body is used as a site for exemplification for the argument about discipline, yet noticeable by its absence. “The human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology, and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control” (Bordo 21).

Nonetheless, Foucault's theories of power, body, and sexuality have always been extensively referred to by feminists taking up the cause of women's emancipation and liberation. In *Fashion* also, the lead figures of Meghna and Shonali are the subjects of power, sexuality, and bodily subversion. All the models in the film that adorn and transform their body with cosmetics, fancy costumes and jewellery are attributed to be feminine, beautiful, and appealing. Such stereotyping in maintaining a specific look by models in the film reflects an apparent dissimilarity between the sexes, at times by overstating physical differences or generating artificial ones. Adorning revealing and scanty clothes is the prerequisite condition for them to be a part of the fashion industry. It can conveniently be said that *Fashion* is obsessed with gender, attempting to define, and redefine the gender margin. Specific female body parts, while female models walk the ramp in the film, are highlighted to seek attention and make them a subject of male gaze and desirability. Models like Meghna, Janet, and Shonali are usually dressed in a sexually appealing manner. Breathing difficulties and discomfort are some of the well-documented issues that these models are subjected to. Here, an analogy has been drawn with Foucault's writing on torture to make it more concise. Foucault, in *History of Sexuality-I* thus states:

But the punishment-body relation is not the same as it was in the torture during public executions. The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations, punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. (34)

Essentially, as per Foucault, such kind of torture can be identified with pre-modern times. However, this type of bodily discipline extends to postmodern times as well. These fashion models possess everything that men fear yet desire; commit the crime of being the 'other'. Men fix punishment for wearing erotic clothing that draws attention to the female's body, along with constraining and correcting it. Foucault

states that mastering body punishment was a very convenient form of asserting power and superior strength (49). *Fashion* is strewn with instances where Meghna, Shonali, Janet, and other female models are draped in uncomfortable costumes and styling. There is a scene in the film where Meghna poses for lingerie commercial. The exploitation of the protagonist's psyche when she poses for the commercial is much more efficacious than the commercial (ab)use of the bikini-clad girls by the most Hindi filmmakers. Male models, on the contrary, dress casually and comfortably, strolling on the ramp with the utmost ease. Simone De' Beauvoir in her iconic *The Second Sex* (1997) asserts that the designs of female costumes are made to prevent activity, hence curtail their ease of movement (189-90). De' Beauvoir's comments about the male conspiracy hatched against women are not in line with Foucault's theories of gender. Yet, the classic methods of physical subjugation like tied feet of Chinese women and rib breaking corsets might not be in vogue in the current scenario but certain varieties of techniques of manipulation, discipline, and discomfort are still commonly exercised.

Meghna and other models like her in the film are made to walk in high heels and stiletto shoes, which requires extensive practice. It affects balance and restricts mobility and ease; resulting in a particular type of gait and posture. These so-called feminine shoes hardly bear any resemblance to real human feet. Pushing the feet in these high heeled and narrowly pointed shoes can cause extensive damage to the wearer. Such kind of bodily discipline does not stop with the female gait and body. They must have super soft, supple, smooth and hairless skin too, for which they need to indulge in a detailed daily skincare routine. There are innumerable cosmetic surgeries performed on the bodies of models to attain a flawless and perfect body and skin. Exposure to 'damaging' elements like sun, wind, and the ultraviolet rays are advised. Quite commonly, these models undergo cosmetic surgery to make the body parts look more desirable. In an attempt to turn women into sought after 'objects', an enormous amount of bodily discipline is expected. It not only causes discomfort but also feelings of inadequacy, leading to killer competition between the models. It reinforces the idea of women being a mere body and confirming their role as a primarily decorative piece. Myths about women being temptresses, frivolous, overtly

sexualised objects, weak, and delicate have been circulated through a variety of sources across the generations.

Entirely filled with glitz and glamour of the fashion world, the milieu of *Fashion* easily lends itself to the display of female bodies. The women become an object of the male fantasy, what Laura Mulvey calls ‘Scopophilia’, discussed in detail in the previous chapters. The women’s body is subjected to the controlling gaze, using it as an object of sexual desire through the spectacle. The entire film is fertile ground for encouraging this voyeuristic fantasy. Mulvey, in her essay, propounds ‘destruction of pleasure’ (Mulvey 43) as an effective weapon to dismantle the object of the gaze, but ironically, the film is said to be promoting scopophilia.

While discussing sexuality and power, Foucault takes up the issue of homosexuality as well. His research aimed at producing an analysis that could demonstrate the objectification process like homosexuality, by which others could recognise and live out. What essentially was needed to come was not homosexuality but the repression that impeded living homosexuality. The power over homosexuality was exercised since it became a subject of medicine. It was addressed as an injury, dysfunction, or symptoms in the depth of body or behavioural sign. Foucault, in his theories, proposed practices of freedom, with which any individual could attempt to develop and access a certain type of being. In *Fashion*, the issue of homosexuality has been taken up, though latently. The two renowned fashion designers in the film are gay. The film tries to show the reality of the fashion world but fails to some extent. Their characterisation, by and large, has been very stereotypical. The film vehemently puts forward the notion that all male designers are gay. That still would have been palatable had they been given strong characters, but the film fails on this account. Heterosexual marriage between Janet and Rahul reinforces the idea of the need for ‘normalcy’ in one’s life. Homosexuality is projected as a trait that one needs to get rid of in order to be normal.

Maanav, while searching for fashion assignments, encounters the people who propose him to be their partner. But he declines such offers even at the cost of his professional progress and relationships. He is told by one of his prospective employers, “Manav, I told you earlier as well. If you want to progress in this industry,

you have to compromise. Come on, do you think that all the successful models found work just like that? They also had to make compromises” (“*Fashion*” 00:19:20).

The schizophrenic self in *Fashion* is another crucial aspect of the discussion of the film. Shifting the attention towards the mental illness like schizophrenia in the character of Shonali forms a very relevant and appropriate debate on the kind of mental trauma women in the fashion industry have to undergo. As stated earlier, the fashion industry is often portrayed as a world of excess, glamour, extravagance, lavishness, endless excitement, and competition. However, most of the people associated with the industry, particularly female models are subjected to a side of the industry that can result in serious damage to mental health like schizophrenia. The fast-paced, heavily observed, and high stakes nature of the fashion world may be the contributing cause of higher than average mental health issues associated with the industry.

Schizophrenia, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter has been defined by Jameson, in his book entitled, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* as “the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language” (118). According to Jameson, the schizophrenic individual lacks personal identity and is unable to differentiate between the world and the self. Such an individual is incapable of experiencing continuity through time. There are several reasons why Jameson associated schizophrenia with postmodernism and late capitalism. Most prominent among those in the media culture of the late twentieth century, which stimulates the schizoid experience. By destroying the distinction between high/low cultures, postmodern culture integrated itself into a capitalist mass culture of the times. This new culture, with all its sexual explicitness, failed to shock and contributes to capitalist culture more than it threatens it. When Jameson diagnoses our culture as schizophrenic, he is telling us that our culture is not fully human. Jameson links schizophrenia to postmodernism and postmodernism to capitalist culture. What he fundamentally intended to propose was that contemporary postmodernism has extended the symptoms of schizophrenia to the masses in the form of postmodern culture. Schizophrenic state destroys the possibility of critical perspectives. Shonali and to some extent, Meghna suffer from the schizophrenic crisis. Several films have been made in Hindi film industry whereby, women are represented to be suffering



from acute schizophrenia. *Aaina* (1993), *Gupt* (1997), *Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya* (2001), *Armaan* (2003), *15, Park Avenue* (2005), *Woh Lamhe* (2006), *Bhool Bhulaiya* (2007) have been some of the Hindi films in recent past which have dealt with female schizophrenic self in an effective manner.

Kangana Ranaut has essayed the role of the schizophrenic individual in her earlier films like *Gangster* (2006), *Woh Lamhe* (2006), *Life In A Metro* (2007), and her character Shonali in *Fashion* carries a hangover of her earlier films. Shonali, as the movie begins, is a highly successful model. It is not a coincidence that Shonali is Meghna's first live exposure to the world of fashion. After having shifted her base to Mumbai, when Meghna attends her first live show in the capacity of an audience member, it is Shonali who is first to walk down the ramp. Dressed in a black sequined gown, she exudes confidence, and Meghna is absolutely smitten by her. There is no reference to her family background and her past. She is like a blaze on the ramp and garners much applause from the audience every time she walks down the ramp, mostly as the lead model.

Kangana Ranaut as Shonali perfectly imbibes the skin of her character and left everyone astonished with her performance. Prominent critic Subhash Jha states about Ranaut that she "is the first female performer of Bollywood since Smita and Shabana who isn't scared to strip her soul naked for the camera, a hugely expressive actress with a phenomenal ability to convey torment, hurt and incredulity through the eyes" (Jha). Her performance in the film invited much critical appreciation. Taran Adarsh praised her convincing portrayal as Shonali and hailed her as the soul of the film (Adarsh). Another film critic, Nikhat Kazmi added that she "does an exquisite metamorphosis from a wispy, high strung, nervous child-woman to a stunning ramp diva" (Kazmi).

Gradually, as the film unfolds, her complex personality is revealed to the audience. She is portrayed as a true blue fashionista. Shonali is shown to be the poster girl for glamour and self-destruction. Famous, lost, envied, and confused; she is a prisoner in a world that she could never escape and which will witness her ultimate downfall. She is projected to be a high headed and arrogant model, whose success seems to have made her conceited. She is seen threatening her hairstylist "Salim, darling. I am the show stopper. Come over for my make-up or should I stop the

show?" (*Fashion* 00:37:21). Her charm and talent have brought her some enviable assignments. Shonali is the face of a leading model agency Panache. Due to her fiery presence on stage, she is given an extended contract with the agency. The executive of Panache, Anisha Roy, is shown telling Shonali, "That was such an impressive show. You were fantastic as always, Shonali. Thank you so much. Panache is extremely proud of you. You are the face of Panache. We'll have to extend your contract" (*Fashion* 00:42:40).

As she is climbing the ladder of success, it is revealed that she is habitual of drug abuse. Shonali's boyfriend, who sustains himself on her earning, provides her with the drugs. In most of the scenes, she is shown to be either smoking, drinking or taking drugs with her gang. She seemingly has no family life or any other social support. She is shown to be very moody and unpredictable. Shonali becomes very unprofessional and does not take her assignments seriously. Nor does she appreciate the value of punctuality. She is warned by Anisha:

Shonali, this is the third complaint. Our clients pay a lot of money for your time. It's only because of my agency and my reputation. That's the reason you stand here today. If you don't take control of yourself, then there are several others who are eager to replace you. Got it?" (*Fashion* 00:50:51)

She misses deadlines and gradually gets out of business. Her habit of drug abuse keeps escalating.

Depiction of schizophrenia and other mental illnesses in films and other forms of mass media influences viewers' perception of these illnesses. Hindi cinema has usually been accused of perpetuating negative stereotypes associated with mental illnesses. Often characters with schizophrenia are depicted with negative attributes like being unlikable, dangerous, aggressive, violent, antisocial, incompetent, and untrustworthy. Studies have revealed that a substantial portion of schizophrenic patients does drug abuse (Dixon et al. 224). While an increasing interest in the research in the field has been observed, not much has been explored about the causes of substance abuse in schizophrenic patients. Numerous theories have been proposed to explore the interlinking of drug abuse and schizophrenia. One of the model hypotheses is that there can be an increase in the likelihood of drug abuse in already

vulnerable patients of schizophrenia. Shonali's deteriorating mental health and her declining career have a direct bearing on her increased frequency of taking drugs. She is unable to resist the temptation to take the drugs. Most of Shonali's conversations with Meghna happen in washrooms or when they are alone in a room. When Meghna becomes the face of Panache, Shonali accidentally comes across her and warns her to be very cautious. Her advice of caution is very instrumental as that is a kind of soothsaying Meghna is going to encounter in her career. She even playfully offers her a smoke which Meghna declines. It can well be said that it is Meghna's alter ego, which is talking to her, as she also treads the same path later in her career.

Shonali's life takes a crucial and tragic turn when during a ramp walk, she encounters a wardrobe malfunction. This is the phase when she turns into her vulnerable best. Though she completes her walk gracefully and professionally, she is intensely disturbed from inside. Meghna's insensitive remark, lack of sympathy or concern towards Shonali shakes her inside out. Meghna suspects Shonali's intent behind this alleged intentional, wilful wardrobe malfunction. Shonali, being shocked by Meghna's reaction, goes into drug injecting spree. The drugs infiltrate into Shonali's veins too. She has lost touch with real life around her. She at times expressed her frenzy by breaking the doors, windows, and scattering the stuff in her room. Her life is chaotic; fluctuating between love and hate, order and chaos, patience and violence. In order to get relief from this stressful and traumatic life, she escapes in the world of drugs even more. She chooses a life away from the orderly world and plunges herself into a chaotic world where she destroys herself. Her substance abuse leads her to madness. She has nightmares and visions in her sleep, fantasies of suicide in a dark room whose windows and doors torture her is a sign of schizophrenia. The voluntary self-harm, the violence exerted towards herself are all signs of her mentally unstable condition. She is suffering from an identity crisis, alienation, and a sense of loneliness. Her condition is a sign of moral degradation, emptiness, and depthlessness that Jameson indicates in his theories. Postmodern consumer culture is commodity-based and has no high regard for the individual or his/her well being. The society with its cruelties and lack of morality has its effects on the lives of people.

After the breakup with her boyfriend, she is deprived of drugs to a large extent. This drives her towards complete insanity. Eventually, Shonali is admitted to a

rehabilitation centre, by which time, her professional life has come to an absolute closure. Her struggle and pitiable condition fill the audience with empathy for her character. Shonali is the victim of excessive pressure and uncertainty modelling profession exerts upon models. As stated earlier, she has no stabilising element in her life. No member of her family or any close friend/ well-wisher is projected who could save Shonali from such a gradually deteriorating condition with their help and support. Researches claim that drug abuse in schizophrenic patients is lifetime prevalence. A large number of patients, around 40%, had recently tried drugs causing general impairment in bodily functions (Dixon et al. 227).

Meanwhile, Meghna has undergone viciousness of her own fate and life conditions. She comes back to Mumbai after the emotional and professional downfall she encounters in the city and goes back to her parents' house in Chandigarh. Meghna's narrative runs parallel to Shonali's. Meghna is now a changed individual, and her personal tragedies have groomed her to be a wiser and more empathetic individual. While watching TV, she sees Shonali on the screen being harassed by paparazzi, who are asking her all sorts of uncomfortable questions. Shonali looks intimidated, lost, and in a very pitiable condition. Meghna brings Shonali to her house and pledges to take care of her as well as she can. Meghna makes all kinds of efforts to soothe and comfort Shonali. Some improvement is shown in Shonali's demeanour. These scenes also reflect the bonding between Shonali and Meghna who were fierce competitors at one point of time in their careers.

In the second part of the film, when Meghna is undergoing a difficult phase and facing an intense struggle to establish herself as a model again after her return from Chandigarh, she is offered a very important fashion show, which could alter her career for good. But Meghna is going through a very low phase and is apprehensive as she has lost all her confidence to walk the ramp again. At this juncture, Shonali gives her boost by saying that while for her (Shonali), it is too late to make a comeback, Meghna still has a chance to redeem herself. Shonali's words act as an inspiration and keep echoing in Meghna's mind as she prepares herself to take the climactic walk of fame. Meghna recognises that it is just a part of her that is weak and she also acknowledges the fact that this that part is not her whole self.

When Meghna is in a do-or-die situation in her ramp walk, she is apprised about the death of Shonali by drug overdose, after having made an escape from her apartment. Absolutely shattered, she walks the ramp nonetheless, shielding her pain in her eyes and her armour of poise. This scene of the film and the walk turns out to be the most stunningly captured scene of the film. She leaves a deep impression on the audience by channelising her pain, sorrow, and bitterness with dramatic expression. Throughout the walk, her eyes hold the tears, as they pierce through the screen. As the walk ends, she breaks down, letting her emotions loose. This scene is suggestive of multiple interpretations. Her not withdrawing from the walk at the last moment despite being so visibly shattered reflects her integrity and commitment to her profession. Her breaking down eventually is suggestive of her humane, empathetic nature and how much impact a schizophrenic individual like Shonali had on her life.

Shonali's death by drug overdose is a form of suicide that she commits perhaps knowingly and intentionally. People from outside the industry find it hard to believe that this often romanticised occupation like the fashion industry can take a toll on its players' mental health. However, the correlation between mental health issues and suicides in the field is not an anomaly. Various professionals from the industry, like models and designers, are often subjected to intensely competitive long hours and high-stress in a demanding and deadline-driven work setting.

Meghna, on the contrary, has a strong support system of family and friends who take her back when she finds herself to be unable to bear it anymore. In the film, Meghna is essayed as a victim of the prevailing circumstances and as a person who has struggled to build her identity. The writing of screenplay by Anuradha Tiwari efficiently delineates the essence of the protagonist's core conflict and the operational intricacies of the fashion world. In the span of the film, Meghna's character is efficiently sketched from being an aspiring model taking the position of an ambitious leading fashion model, moving on to be a strident supermodel to a faded and forgotten model desperate to create a place for herself again. No wonder, in every phase, her character displays a contrasting range of emotions. Meghna's journey is a multi-hued travelogue of a small-town girl who wants to make it big in a big city. But the struggle is hard, and the price she pays for her success is high. Meghna was fortunate to have a

good and close circle of friends and family who came forward to support her when she destabilises in her pursuits.

When Meghna joined the industry, she was a naive and vulnerable girl in a relatively small city. She would easily believe anyone promising her decent work. After one of such misleading promises by a fraudster, Shonali reprimands her for her naiveté: “What's the problem with you small-town girls? Anyone who speaks halfway decent English can get anywhere with you” (qtd. from *Fashion*, 2008). She makes some good friends in the industry who support her and helps her in finding her way up, including Maanav, Janet, and Rohit. Ironically, they are the same people who meet her on her downwards journey. Once having tasted the success, Meghna's mannerism and personality undergo a sea change. She is no more a naive, simple, and ambitious girl; rather becomes a dedicated professional. Obsessed with her success, she misbehaves and acts in a very hurtful manner with all three of them. Meghna replaces Shonali as the main model of Panache. Shonali has always been a source of inspiration and professional rivalry for Meghna. Meghna's getting into a relationship with married Abhijit marks the beginning of her downfall. Abhijit makes her a show-stopper as well as pregnant. A relationship that should have been entirely professional becomes personal and a matter of enmity between the two. Abhijit uses her for his success, and perhaps she, too, uses him for her success; yet this point is never raised in the film. When Meghna gets pregnant, she tells Abhijit that she wants to keep the child.

Abhijit's reaction breaks Meghna thoroughly. He indirectly refers to the clause in the contract according to which she can neither get pregnant nor get married. The conversation between them follows like this:

Meghna: There's something I want to tell you.

Abhijit: Go on.

Meghna: I am pregnant.

Abhijit: That's all. Not to worry, it can be handled.

Meghna: And what if I tell you that I want to keep the baby.

Abhijit: Sure, I am okay with it. I don't have a problem, but Anisha might have a problem. You have signed a contract. (*Fashion* 01:39:20)

He succumbs to societal pressure and starts ignoring Meghna. Unwillingly, she undergoes a medical termination of pregnancy. This experience leaves a very long-lasting and distressing impact on the psyche of Meghna. She is unable to tolerate the position of being the ‘other woman’ in the life of Abhijit and undergoes a sense of being unwanted. To avenge her humiliation, she reveals the secret of her pregnancy to Abhijit’s wife. Finding no other way to relieve her anguish, she indulges in ‘unlawful and immoral’ activities that ruin her life and career. In this phase, she looks like the alter-ego of Shonali, who she had left behind in the war of competition. Her unprofessionalism causes her eviction from all major assignments and professional circles. Abhijit prefers to not to recognise her as she encounters him:

Meghna: I think you have taken my words too seriously. You have become so professional that you are uneasy greeting me.

Abhijit: Behave yourself. You are drunk.

Meghna (sarcastically): I am drunk?” (“*Fashion*” 01:47:49)

Her arrogance has taken over her mind and body, also she is under the impression that it is because of her, Panache exists. She tells Anisha: “Wrong, Anisha. I am the freaking face of Panache. I don’t need Panache; Panache needs me. Okay? Anything else?” (“*Fashion*” 01:49:40). Consequently, her contract with Panache is aborted and she is shown the door by signing a new model Gauri. This event has a sense of *déjà vu* as Shonali’s contract was also terminated because of her high headedness. When Meghna accuses Anisha of being unprofessional and shameless, Anisha retorts: “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? When we replaced Shonali, you didn’t ask me this” (“*Fashion*” 01:51:05). This follows Meghna’s monologue, reflective of her inner destabilised state of mind. While drinking extensively, she narrates:

My career started falling like a pack of cards, and I stood there, a mere spectator. Everything changed. Home, relationships, and along with them, I changed too. Commitments, sincerity, professionalism, I ran away from all of them and reached a place so loud, that I couldn’t even hear myself. What I was doing, why I was doing it, I had no clue at all. Shonali was right; I couldn’t even recognise myself. (“*Fashion*” 01:51:24)

Due to her arrogance, she ends up ruining her relationship with all her well-wishers. She keeps plunging into the abysmal depth of hopelessness and deterioration. Her condition reaches the level of insanity and postmodern schizophrenia. At a party, she indulges in drugs and one night stand with a stranger. When she realises what she has done, she is filled with intense remorse and regret. She has absolutely no clue where her life was headed.

Having ruined her personal life and professional status, she decides to come back to her native city, Chandigarh. Her monologue follows:

We become totally isolated when we lose our own company. I came back home to Chandigarh, but I could never be myself. Leaving all my relationships behind, I descended into my inner darkness. I neither felt happy nor sad. The psychiatrist advised that nothing is possible until I rediscover myself and my inner self-confidence. But as easy as it is to lose oneself, it is even more difficult to forgive oneself; to find oneself again (*"Fashion"* 02:02:32).

In this phase, Meghna battles with intense depression. Her demeanour and mannerism are all reflective of the inner struggle she is going through. While at Mumbai, and even before that when she lived in Chandigarh, she sported trendy and fashionable clothes, but currently, she is seen in simple salwar kameez without any makeup and hairdo. The scenes are picturised at Chandigarh to impart authenticity to the backdrop. She stares into nothing and communicates infrequently. She has lost her appetite and avoids people. Kelly Press, in one of the articles in *Fashion United*, discusses the mental illnesses in the fashion industry:

A study conducted by the US Center for Disease Control, which compared suicide rates among occupations, confirmed a strong correlation between working in the fashion industry and developing mental illnesses [...] High pressure to be original and innovative and to work excessive hours. The constant pressure of the industry to come up with 'next big thing', the cult of youth, and culture of working around the clock and therefore not getting enough rest that puts mental health at risk. (Press)



Father of Meghna (Raj Babbar) who was against her decision to join the fashion industry has a change of the heart when he intercepts her staring longingly at the TV screen displaying a ramp walk. Executing his fatherly duty, he motivates Meghna to join the fashion industry and start afresh. Inspired and rejuvenated, Meghna heads back to Mumbai, where she encounters the same people who she had insulted and rebuked while being successful. Meghna has seen the flip side of life and professional uncertainties, which she now regrets about. She seeks their forgiveness and is granted the same; particularly Janet proves to be very benevolent and supportive. Meanwhile, Maanav, with whom she had been in a romantic relationship in her struggling days, is engaged to someone else. Nonetheless, she strives hard and starts from scratch. She comes across several people who mock her and her attempts to re-establish herself in the fashion world, yet she is determined to make it successful.

Re-establishing oneself in such a highly rapid and competitive industry is not a mean task, especially when so much onus is put on beauty and youthfulness. Hundreds of new faces join the industry every month and the old ones are conveniently forgotten. The concept of postmodern New Depthlessness is very relevant here. Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* defines New Depthlessness as:

Depthlessness manifests itself through the postmodern rejection of the belief that one can ever fully move beyond the surface appearances of ideology or “false consciousness” to some deeper truth; we are left instead with “multiple surfaces.” One result is “that our daily life, our psychic experience, our Cultural languages, is today dominated by categories of space rather by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism.” (16)

The postmodern lifestyle of glamour, competitiveness, shallowness, and the superiority of self has pushed the higher human sensibilities at the back where the distinction between high/low cultures blurs, and the line gets vanished. Meghna and Shonali are also a victim of this segregation and pay the price of being an ambitious and aspiring model in the world of cutthroat competition.

Meghna returns to Mumbai with a transformed mind and finding Shonali in the miserable condition, leaves no stone unturned to drag her out of the pool of misery

and hopelessness. Now, she can relate with the plight of Shonali as she also has experienced the trauma of experiencing failure and rejection. Meghna is a New Woman of the postmodern world as she does not succumb to the adverse situations and fights for her rightful place in the world. She not only takes herself out of the rut of emotional postmodern schizophrenia but also makes sincerest efforts to take Shonali along, who was her staunch competitor at one point in time. She does not let her inner insecurities and past come her way in extending a helping hand to Shonali. Though unfortunately, she is not able to help her out much in the end.

Both Meghna and Shonali were beautiful, confident, and successful models but a very crucial difference between the struggle of Meghna and Shonali was that Meghna had family and social support which help her to come out of her mental illness, whereas Shonali hardly had any such support system. There is nobody to guide her, assist her, or provide moral conditioning in the need of the hour. All she has in the name of the close relationship is her greedy boyfriend who leaves her when she stops sustaining his lifestyle. On the other hand, Meghna bears the consequences of the steep rise to fame. Unfortunately, she loses out on fame and fortune she amassed in a relatively short span of time without a resolute backbone, when the weight got unbearable. Dramatically, it is Meghna's journey that is the most comprehensive as it delineates her transformation from an ambitious and young girl to an arrogant model that fails to handle her success; falls and then has phoenix-like rise.

Fashion models display the physical perfection that most other young women only aspire to have. Their bodily perfection, the money earned by them, and the attention that they receive, all becomes a matter of envy and inspiration for the women of the younger generations. The artificiality and hollowness are the part and parcel of this transitory occupation which usually leaves talented models redundant after a short career of modelling. Both Shonali and Meghna became a victim of the highly volatile and showy business of fashion. One of them succeeds in re-establishing herself and the other one succumbs to the pressure and expectations.

The film furnishes a comprehensive and perceptive analysis of postmodern consumerist culture's tight hold over the destinies of women working for the fashion industry. The film carefully depicts how and why the objectification of models occurs in the industry which takes a toll on their mental and physical well being. The film

brings forth the female characters' traumatic experiences and their struggle to establish themselves in the razor-sharp competition of the fashion world in the postmodern society. Display professions like modelling act in the interest of patriarchy based cultures by reducing them to the status of objects. Reinforced notions about bodily perfection, propagated by the market forces, propel them to consider themselves as inadequate; beauty industry taking advantage of their sense of inadequacy. Nonetheless, Meghna's journey from a small city girl to being an arrogant and successful model to sliding down to the failure and subsequently emerging as a fighter qualifies her to be the New Woman.

## Chapter 6

### ***Queen*: Transgressing the Limits of Performativity**

This chapter seeks to illustrate how the main character of *Queen*, Rani and another crucial female character Vijyalaxmi negotiate themselves through Indian traditions and capitalist postmodernity to emerge as New Woman of the contemporary times. In order to analyse this emergence in the light of postmodern sensibilities and beliefs, Judith Butler's notion of performativity will be put forward as a critical concept. The analysis of the film will illustrate that the Hindi film industry has a tendency to refer to itself, instead of strongly adhering to the values outside. It does not necessarily mean that these outside values have disappeared in Hindi films, it does; however create a space in which certain deviations from the status quo are possible.

*Queen* constructs a certain space for its characters in which they can perform a morality which is markedly unique from what is acceptable in India at large- both as defined by unwritten laws of the Hindi films (limited physical intimacy) as well as what happens in the Indian society at large (moral policing). This chapter analyses the manner in which the female protagonist of *Queen*, Rani, manages to steer her way through these anxieties as a part of her coming of age. This chapter continues on Judith Butler's premise that it is through the repetitive performance that gender is constructed. Rani breaks free from the manacles of the performance that she is supposed to do, in order to emerge as a New Woman of the postmodern age.

*Queen*, released in 2014, was one of the highest grosser of the year; earning approximately around Rs. 97 crores ("Queen"). The film was critically acclaimed by the critics and viewers alike. The film received several awards. Kangana Ranaut received the National Award for the Best Actress (2015). The director of the film Vikas Bahl explores in the film a girl's identity as an independent identity. The film is about a simple and naive girl who proceeds for her honeymoon alone not with any pre-determined agenda but explores her identity nonetheless. She discovers her worth far away from her family, friends, acquaintances, culture, and society. The film is a counter-narrative unique to Hindi films, attempting to approach the subject of woman

identity in relation to both love and marriage. While reviewing *Queen*, prominent critic Sudhish Kamat states :

Over ninety-five percent of Hindi cinema revolves around men. And even the other five percent Hindi films with women protagonists are often seen through the male gaze, which is why *Queen* is such a refreshing holiday from the routine. This is not your regular makeover film where a small-town girl becomes a modern bombshell and/or finds her prince charming /true love overnight. This is not a revenge film of getting even after being left at the altar. This is not even a film about women's issues. (Kamat)

The film is a coming of age example of Indian womanhood. When released in 2014, the film was hailed as a specimen to the empowered status of women in Hindi cinema, a shift from predictable subjugation and subsequent trauma women undergo. Indiaglitz reviews the film as:

Vikas Bahl comes with such an emotionally satisfying and brilliantly played on-screen beacon on Indian womanhood with *Queen* under Viacom 18 and Phantom films production, weaving together a magnificent tapestry of femininity with an affectionate hug to life and friendship in this poignant story of love, coincidence, resilience, and self-acceptance. With *Queen*'s profound depth and maturity, Vikas amazingly says what he wants many times with silence in this exquisitely crafted coming of age, an inspirational beacon on womanhood in Bollywood. ("Queen Review")

One of the reviews of the film states "The narrative is laced with laconic humour and delightfully enjoyable reflections that the lead protagonist makes about herself and her situation while honeymooning in Paris and Amsterdam" (Ruhani). Ranaut's performance is analysed as "Ranaut as Rani is pitch-perfect. She brings out the sweetness, the hurt, the belligerence, and the head-screwed-tightly on her shoulders sensibility that is the pride of Indian middle class" (Pal). "*Queen* is a significant Bollywood marker, a film that is intensely local and gloriously global, with a terrific lead performance by Kangana Ranaut, in a story that bubbles over with real feeling and meaning" (Gupta).

Rani is a young Punjabi girl in her twenties, living in Delhi, deserted by her fiancé Vijay just before the wedding. The film traces her recovery from the shock of betrayal to the time when she embarks upon her pre-booked honeymoon in Paris and Amsterdam, experiencing unique experiences, changing in many ways, and finding happiness in the process. The narrative can be attributed to being a journey of self-discovery and healing through exposure by travelling to distant lands, learning to fend for oneself, seeing a never seen before the world, and making new friends of diverse culture and both the genders on the way. Queen is the story of coming of age and finding the courage to be complete within oneself. Though aimed at travelling with her husband post marriage as a honeymooner in this cinematic journey; Rani, the protagonist, converts herself into a single traveller with no male partner. She then takes on the garb from a *behenji* (slang for a simple, unexposed girl) on foreign land to a participant in a new relationship and exploring the new lands. Rani is a stranger who moves through space with her loneliness, vulnerability, naiveté, and detachment as an observer to someone who is comfortable, happy and content in her newfound exposure to the world, finding her rightful place on the way. Rani's 'meaningless loitering' alone on foreign land is a deliberate narrative to bring focus to the metamorphosis of the female protagonist in Hindi films who has been seen singing a romantic song in foreign locales with the male lead.

Before an analysis of the film could be performed further, it would be pertinent to discuss the role of women in Hindi films. Women in Hindi cinema have been the bystanders to the real social and the cultural progression made around them. They mostly have been stereotyped negatively or as a powerless force. Jackson and Jackie state in this regard:

Women's position within media power structures and media representation of women are persistent concerns in every society because negative stereotyping and lack of female input both reflect and reinforce wider gender inequalities. Films, indeed in the most effective manner, maintain the diffusion of traditional female gender roles, in which women are depicted in culture and society. Research on gender and cinema has emphasized the question about women's identity. In fact, the study of the images of women in cinema was a central concern

of the 'second wave' feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, criticizing women's image in film and women's roles in the film industry. (122)

The interest taken in the film industry by feminists is usually due to the under-representation or misrepresentation of women by the filmmakers. Feministic studies take a critical approach towards gender bias in Hindi cinema, asking some relevant queries like how women are treated in cinema, how their concerns are taken by the filmmakers, how does feminist agenda manifests onscreen, how women characters are positioned vis-à-vis their male counterparts, and debate on the role of female filmmakers & writers in projecting the issues of women on screen. The recent release *Kabir Singh* (2019), directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, has stirred a debate on the treatment and objectification of women in Hindi films. The film has been labelled to be misogynistic, violent, creating a sense of entitlement for men, and propagating drug and alcohol (Thakur). The film, as some of the critics like Suma Nagaraj opine "The likes of which should never have seen the light of day should have been tossed in a garbage bin while still in the script form" (Nagaraj). Interestingly, the film has also received support from critics like Animesh Pandey who states "The lead character is no hypocrite; he has a 'devil may care' attitude, and sometimes goes too far in proving this. This attitude can trouble many and has certainly put the left-liberal 'woke feminists' into a frenzy" (Pandey). This whole debate essentially highlights the space women inhabit in the world of Hindi cinema, where there are still defenders like Pandey favouring the misogynistic treatment of the women.

Women in Hindi films have usually been uni-dimensional characters without any intricate delineation of the characters. They mostly are good or bad without a shade of grey. This contradiction was reinforced in films which made a clear demarcation between the good leading lady and the bad woman. Hindi films have also been heavily influenced by religion and culture where women are perceived to be the epitome of values and virtue, imbibing supreme features of the Ideal Woman. A very staple exemption to this depiction is *Mother India* released in 1957 which projected a very challenging and substantial role played by Nargis. Otherwise, for the majority of the films, the ideal woman was projected to be docile, timid, fragile, and dependent; mostly dressed in a traditional dress whereby the vamps donned bold outfits. In order

to project some women to be morally degraded, they were dressed in the Western-styled outfits:

When it comes to Hindi cinema, the female characters are portrayed in two extremes: they are goddesses or incarnation of the devil, the vamp. Their actions are motivated by high moral principals or the enticement of power, person, and property. The majority of these characters are stereotyped as villainous and keen on wrongdoings. (Khatri)

Looking at the 1970s and 80s, the vamps of the era were some of the first women to smoke, drink, and engage in extra-marital relationships on screen, quite unlike the main lead played by other actresses as pious women. Such activities indicated questionable morale. Interestingly, when male actors indulged in the same activities, they were termed to be macho. Female main leads were docile, shy, and dependent women carrying the responsibility of preserving and protecting the Indian culture. It was in the nineties that their role started undergoing a dramatic metamorphosis, by becoming more substantial. During the 1990s and 2000s, being the actress meant more than being eye candy and dancing around the trees. This phenomenon was corroborated with the fact that in the wake of postmodernisation and globalisation, women in Indian society were witnessing a change in their position. They were better educated and had innumerable opportunities and this was also reflected in cinema.

But it was the films released in the last two decades or so that have re-defined the Indian women in the world of cinema. Their characters grew to be as strong as that of the male protagonist, only more profound. She executes the roles from vast dimensions, including shrewd politicians, cunning businesswoman, successful entrepreneur, etc. exhibiting boundless power and strength. Recent films like *Queen*, *Kahaani*, *Padmaavat*, *Raazi*, *Stree*, *Badhaai Ho*, *NH 10*, *Neerja*, *Parched*, *English Vinglish*, *Lunchbox*, *Fashion*, *Mary Kom* etc. highlight the changed positions female leads have created for themselves after decades and decades of playing a mindless puppet in the hands of their male counterparts. With postmodern sensibilities arising out of globalised overview, women in Hindi films have started registering their presence in the domain; asserting their rights and due position. Globalisation has led to the emergence of alternative modes of Indian femininity, as expressed in popular Hindi films that depart from the portrayal of Indian women as upholders of a moral



code (Khan 3642). Drawing on observations from select contemporary Hindi films, feminist scholars have noted that women characters in Hindi films are portrayed as increasingly independent and strong (Gupta 112). Forces of postmodernism and globalisation have created new work opportunities; encouraging Indian women to enter the job market and to be financially independent. Also, during recent decades, women have more access to education than ever before. Both these trends are reflected in contemporary Hindi films through female characters that hold a central position in the films' narrative. These women, as stated earlier, are educated, career-oriented, and have a better reign over their lives, bodies, and choices.

This whole debate on the representation of women in Hindi cinema has paved the way for a discussion on the definition of the New Woman in the current context. The essence of the New Woman in India, nurtured by the nationalist agenda, differed from its counterpart westernised notion in many of its fundamental ethics including the ideas of cultural refinement, social liberation, and gender rights. This Indian New Woman was supposed to possess traditional 'feminine values' of docility, submissiveness along a globalised outlook. She was expected to be the flag bearer of traditional values while incorporating the Western values. There were different parameters about the levels of westernisation for men and women. (Chatterjee 237). Protagonist Rani breaks the shackles of these dichotomies by not performing her gender the way she is expected to perform.

Discussion on gender has increasingly become an issue of the present times. Courtesy extensive debate on gender-related issues in the public domain, the focus on women's issues has come out to the dominant public forums. Several authors write about how these gender roles are formed. According to Mari Mikkola, the differences between genders are caused by social interventions in which people are told not to behave a certain way because it does not match their gender (12). Michael Kimmel states that what is part of a gender role depends on the context. "Definitions of masculinity and femininity vary" (87-88), he mentions variation amongst cultures, time, race, sexuality education, and more. Kate Millet says that gender has a "cultural character" (29). For example, the expectations we as a society have of young women or of old men, we share them among ourselves and talk about them, and by doing that we are shaping those genders. Mikkola says something similar that the behavioural

traits we associate with women and men are culturally learned (11). According to Sally Haslanger, saying that gender is socially constructed in some contexts means the same as saying that the reason women are feminine and men are masculine is socially determined instead of biologically determined (98). Though women remain to be the major sufferers of this gender discrimination, yet the debate on gender is no more exclusively on women by women. The binary division of male and female remains to be the norm for gender categorisation. As per the prevalent beliefs of society, everyone is either male or female. Such demarcation is accorded at the birth of an individual, depending upon one's biological sex. That is why every human classified to be male should act as per the gender category of 'man' and everybody assigned the category of the female must approximate those of the category of 'woman'.

The gendered character of the society is manifested at the most obvious level in having the toilets based on the needs of specific sex/ gender, which acknowledge only two limited types of sex/gender categorizations. Through this mode, the idea of binary gender is created in our spatial surroundings. Official documents also entail the applicants to mark a specific gender. The notion of binary gender complicates the social reality further when we consider individuals who do not fit into the category of either male or female, for example, inter-sexed people. Transgendered people do not identify with either gender category of male or female. One may, for example, be born as a female, legally or anatomically, yet feel more secure in acting and behaving as male in terms of gender.

Also, one may feel regulated by neither of the gender categories, yet contracted between the two. Such individuals are not recognised as a part of social reality, and that is something that makes their lives particularly difficult, as this social reality is quite strictly bound around the binary gender (male/female) categorisation. Considering this kind of disparity, it will be apt to revisit the notion of gender in popular discourse. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet while writing *An Introduction to Gender* (2013) argue:

To whatever extent, gender may be related to biology; it does not flow naturally and directly from our bodies. The individual's chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics do not determine occupation, gait, or use of color terminology. And while

male pattern baldness may restrict some adult men's choice of hairdo, there are many men who could sport a pageboy or a beehive as easily as many women and nothing biological keeps women from shaving their heads. Gender is the very process of creating a dichotomy by effacing similarity and elaborating on difference, and where there are biological differences, these differences are exaggerated and extended in the service of constructing gender. (5)

While elaborating upon the significance of gender studies and its role in constructing identities and positioning individuals in the society as per that identity, several theorists have debated on the issue of gender performativity. Claire Duchen highlights the necessity of debate on gender formation in his essay *Gender* (1994):

Gender understood in its various ways, is now accepted as a social variable as important as race and class, and as such, has made a considerable impact on the academy. From knowledge production to course content, the social relation of the sexes (when that is what gender is said to be) and the role, status and experience of women (when *that* is what gender is to be) cannot be ignored or omitted anymore. (227)

This gender performance is the concept Judith Butler focuses on in detail in her iconic book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990). The notion has been discussed in detail in an earlier chapter where the theory was applied for the analysis of the film. In her landmark book, Butler revolutionised the idea about sex (the biological difference of being a female or male), sexuality (unique character of sex-based desires), and gender (behaviours usually used to differentiate between 'male' and 'female'). As the core idea, the book argues that gender identity is not normal, but a product of social convention. In *Gender Trouble*, gender is defined as:

If gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, then gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment that stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or

that “women” will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that gender ought to remain as two. (45)

Butler’s central argument, as discussed in Chapter Three in detail, is that gender is not a natural phenomenon and it has no inherent link with someone’s sex. Rather, long-accepted social norms about behaviour, costumes, and mannerism give it the appearance of expected behaviour. This, in a way, implies that culturally coded masculine behaviour is natural for men and feminine behaviour for women. Butler attributes this tendency of naturalness discharges from society as a whole. Butler states:

Is there “a” gender which persons are said to *have*, or is it an essential attribute that a person is said *to be* as implied in the question “What gender are you”? When feminist theories claim that gender is the cultural interpretation of sex or that gender is Culturally constructed, what is the matter of mechanism of this construction? If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determination, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation? (7)

Performativity of gender, as stated earlier, is a stylised repetition of acts; miming of prevailing conventions of gender. Butler argues that “the acts that one does, the act that one performs, is an act that’s been going on before one arrived on the scene” (13). Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily, in their article, argue that Butler in *Gender Trouble* provides a thorough critique of subjecthood. They insist that “Butler is driven by a radical impulse, not only to complicate and multiply identity formations by recognising difference across time and space but above all, to subvert and implode the very basis of identity itself” (460).

Butler also received criticism for her notion that gender is performative and not a stable identity. Jay Prosser, in his criticism, explained that transgender people use the term gender identity to explain a difference between the gender they identify with and their assigned sex and the genders others perceive them to be (133). That is where Butler’s notion of performativity poses a real difficulty. Butler in *Undoing*

*Gender* responds to the criticism by saying that if she would write *Gender Trouble* in present circumstances, she would include more text on transgender and intersexuality (35).

This idea of gender performativity is what genders are supposed to execute to fit into a normative behaviour. *Queen* is a fine specimen where Rani overcomes her inhibitions, self-denial, and under-confidence. The premise of the film is based out of typical middle-class Punjabi family living in Rajouri Garden in modernised Delhi, where young girls are groomed as a mix of old and new values. Kangana Ranaut in this iconic role makes the film an absolutely enchanting observation. She captures the attention of the audience with her charm, simplicity, innocence, susceptibility, strength, tenderness, and her gradual confidence.

The film begins through the camera and the viewer is transported to Rani's hectic family home, as the preparations for her wedding are going on. As the scene progresses, a short conversation between Rani and her grandmother is witnessed. The viewer is granted access to Rani's inner thought process, her hopes and dreams concerning marriage. The time slows down and the ambient noises fade. Rani is concerned about the practical issues related to marriage; what her parents, little brother, and friends are doing. Her soliloquy is symbolic of her traditional way of imagining her wedding. She recognises the importance of marriage plays in society. Her mentioning that her father decorated the shop 'like a bride' ("*Queen*" 00:04:54) is an obvious reference to the grand role marriage plays in an individual's life. The wedding is a traditional society becomes bigger than the affair between individuals like Vijay (Rajkumar Rao) and Rani; in addition to joining two individuals, it also mediates by (re) organising relationships within the community. Rani is eagerly waiting for a time when she will be able to upload her wedding pictures to Facebook ("*Queen*" 00:05:10), further illustrating the idea how Rani imagines her wedding as an issue of status. While mentioning Vijay in her soliloquy, she uses the word *aap*, *aaye* instead of *tum* (you), *aaya* (came). Expressions like *aap*, *aaye* are used to address someone elder or superior in position, if not used for their basic plural-forming function. Rani's addressing Vijay in these forms shows that she places Vijay in a superior position to herself. These instances reflect that Rani has a fairly traditional outlook towards the institution of marriage. The context provided by the

introductory glimpse of Rani and the wedding setup effectively directs the mind of viewers towards the personality of Rani as a typical Indian, traditional, middle-class girl. The clues supplied by the visual features like clothing, expression, stature, her bonding with other characters divulge the details about Rani's personality.

After the joyous introduction, Rani slips away from the wedding sight to see her husband- to- be Vijay. Traditionally, going out and the meeting would be spouse a day before the wedding is considered inauspicious in the Indian society, and Rani is opposed to the idea of meeting. Rani is struck with immense disbelief when Vijay tells her that he cannot marry her. It takes her some time to realise what he was uttering. Though he was the one who pursued her into marriage initially, his stay in London had changed him thoroughly. He changed, but Rani remained the same. He states, "For me, it's all about travel, business, meetings. It will be tough on you" ("*Queen*" 00:10:40). It is quite apparent that Rani, a traditional god-fearing, simple girl does not figure into Vijay's all-new jet-set cosmopolitan life.

Vijay tries to mitigate the effect by projecting as if he is not doing it on purpose and it has befallen upon them, and that he is sympathetic towards her. Rani assumes it to be his pre-wedding nervousness. She is completely clueless and does not know what she is supposed to do at this revelation. In a moment of wild speculation, she holds out her doubt that Vijay is in a relationship with someone else. She leaves the coffee shop, only to return after a while, still in the dazed state. She cries as Vijay tries to calm her down as he does not want her to create a scene. He is more concerned and conscious about the people around than the well being of Rani. Eventually, when he is too embarrassed and sees that nothing is stopping her from crying, he promises her that he will give her a call and intimate her parents about the decision. These were just false promises as he had no intention to call her up. Rani is so shocked that she is unable to say anything meaningful and is again overridden by Vijay. He tries to convince her that "Since you are such a good girl, you will find someone in Rajouri itself, someone of your type, who will keep you happy" ("*Queen*" 00:11:40). By saying that she would find someone of her type, he implicates that she is not his type. While suggesting to her that she should remain in touch, he takes Rani for granted, a highly submissive girl who has no self-esteem and can be treated in any manner. She literally begs of him "Look when I would tell

father, he would get a heart attack. I beg you, marry me. Who would marry me? Vijay, all preparations are done at my home, just marry me once” (“*Queen*” 00:12:30). She certainly does not look like someone who will retaliate or stand up for her rights. It is quite evident from the conversation that Rani has been a cocooned girl and has never been exposed to mature handling of such critical situations. Naive Rani seems to have trusted his words because once back home, she constantly keeps checking her phone for the anticipation of his call.

Rani’s family background is conservative and overprotective. Her brother Chintu tags along everywhere with her though he is younger and not much able to ‘protect’ her. This symbolises that Rani’s family does not believe her to be capable enough of taking care of herself. This safeguarding is a common phenomenon in Indian households who presume their daughters to be delicate and vulnerable, who need a constant vigilance of males, even if they are much younger. She also puts a very high premium on her being a virgin, which is revealed when she is having a conversation with her friend Sonal. Virginity has been a very high held virtue in typical traditional Indian society. “It is interesting to see that modern India has arguably the most conservative approach towards virginity. Virginity is seen as directly linked to moral values and principles” (Nair). Cultures across the globe place a high premium on virginity in women causing a tremendous level of mental strain on women and their families. Highlighting the issue of virginity, Mehak Nagpal and Sathyanarayna Rao state:

Virginity has long been a custom associated with the esteem of the kin group and the ideology represents the issue of men’s access to women and underlying themes of inequality of the sexes. This represented male dominance and female subjugation, which had become more pronounced and men insisted on their exclusive rights to the women they owned. Thus the woman was required to be a virgin at marriage and monogamous so the man could be certain that any child she conceived was his. (3)

Rani, as a traditional and culturally rooted girl, invests all her plans, emotions, and sentiments in her future married life. She is unable to fathom a life that focuses on her

own self-growth and aspirations. And once Vijay has refused to get married, Rani immerses herself in gloom and isolation.

By being such an inert and passive recipient of the events occurring around her and the course of fate taking turns, Rani is performing her gender. The cultural milieu that she inhabits expects her to be docile and mute. Traditionally, being resistant and rebellious, raising her voice against the injustice meted out to her is not a virtue most Indian women are not ideally expected to have. All along, Vijay was the one pursuing her for the marriage, but as his perspective to the life changes, so does his treatment of Rani. It was more of a relationship of convenience lacking any genuineness or depth; else it would not have collapsed like a pack of cards.

There are regular flashbacks throughout the movie, indicative of Rani's nostalgia about the past. Her looking longingly at her wedding sari, their first meeting, and Vijay's proposal to her for marriage all are hurtful now. While looking at the sari, her eyes fall on the passport and ticket she had placed there for her honeymoon. She is reminded of the time when she closed her bank account and withdrew every single penny to fund her honeymoon. The action is indicative of a keen desire to go for a honeymoon. She states, "Since the age of seventeen, I have been dreaming to visit my favourite place for my honeymoon" ("*Queen*" 00:27:35). When the bank clerk asks her if she plans to travel to Goa, then she states, "No. Foreign country. Paris. Paris is my favourite place and his Amsterdam" ("*Queen*" 00:27:45). Rani apparently is so tactless that she does not even realise that she is divulging her personal detail in public and causing inconvenience to the public by blocking the row. Gradually and seemingly, Rani comes out of the shock of her life and joins her family for breakfast the next morning. They are relieved to see her relatively normal behaviour, symbolising a regular parental concern for the disturbed child.

The narrative takes a full circle when Rani announces that she intends to go to her honeymoon alone. Her statement is received with utter astonishment by the family who cannot even fathom that such a probability could ever exist. Here as well, Rani is seeking permission to take such a step and has no intention of going against their wishes. Considering her nature, she would never rebel against her parents and bombard them with her headstrong decisions. Nonetheless, her parents, who are overly protective and conservative, grant her permission. The reason for going against



their temperament and belief system could have been that they most likely empathise with her current condition and want her to have some solace and recovery from her traumatic rejection. Quite visibly, Rani has not recuperated from her sorrow and is in state of gloom even while leaving for the new destination. Having lived all her life under the protection of her parents and intending to live the rest of her life under the shadow of her husband, Rani, the Queen, departs for a journey, the ways of which are completely unknown to her and the land entirely alien.

The very first experience of the new place that she has perplexes her, and she looks completely dazed. She looks anxious and clueless on her (perhaps) first international flight. She cannot speak French and finds it extremely difficult to communicate with strangers while asking for directions and other information. It leads to various amusing instances, including when she orders a dish from the menu just by indicating towards it without realising what the dish actually was. She wishes to have 'her room' at the hotel but is in for a rude shock when she realises that the room was booked under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Vijay Dhingra.

Deliberating about the name, Queen is a nickname given to Rani by Vijay. The title of the movie carries a deeper meaning and relevance. The title is the sign of undercurrent belief running across the movie. The significance is so slight that the viewer generally tends not to observe it. In multiple ways, the title unravels the interface between the East and the West. The point to be noted here is that the film is not titled as 'Rani' but as 'Queen', a nickname given to Rani by her fiancé. This looks peculiar, considering that the language establishes the identity of an individual through his/her name. The distortion of the name is nothing but indicative of control on an emotional, and thus, on an elemental level of the self of an individual. For instance, it is said that the practice of acquiring a husband's surname by wife and dropping her maiden surname is a form of subjugation. Vijay's addressing her as 'Queen' is also suggestive of prevailing class consciousness, as he feels English be superior to Hindi. While addressing her as Queen, Vijay exhibits his hidden wish for a companion who will befit his social standard. A woman who wears trendy, modern clothes, can move around in 'higher' class, yet has not deserted her traditional Indian values of being homely, meek, and submissive. The word Queen denotes a powerful, authoritative and independent individual but in the current context, the word holds no

more value than referring to a trophy wife, who is presentable yet, has no identity of her own. He has so much control over her that he ascribes her new name. Such a character of Queen is nothing more than an eye-wash, dealt with like a puppet in private and as a trophy wife in public. So rather than serving as a sign of women's emancipation, the title *Queen* arguably displays a woman subjugated and oppressed.

The perception of the Indian male psyche under the influence of the Western ideology has not undergone any transformation so far the women in the Indian culture are concerned. Rather, the influence has resulted in mixing up their anticipation of women being a sex-symbol holding Indian values, resulting in blatant hypocrisy. Underneath their appealing and modern appearance, she is anticipated to be possessing traditional heart and mind. This hypocrisy forms the central theme of the film and titling the film as *Queen* exposes it as mentioned earlier. It is through Rani's transformation that these two opposing and continuous processes are shown to us.

Tremendous cultural, political, economic, and sociological changes in postmodernised and post-liberalised India have led to reception and assimilation of Western thought, culture, and lifestyle through the channels of media, market, and technology. This phenomenon is not exclusive to India, rather has spread across the globe. Cultural transfers are the hallmarks of the new globalised era. And this exposure has exacerbated uncertainty about the Cultural distinctiveness and sense of belongingness. Aping the West for respectability and higher status while attempting to hold on to traditional and sometimes oppressive Cultural traditions, is a common Indian phenomenon. Gauri D. Chakraborty in her article states:

Bollywood cinema has explored the context of self-discovery in an alien land where the female protagonist is alienated from the forces of traditional gender expectations back home. Both in *Queen* and *English Vinglish*, the female protagonist, is positioned on the fringe of this new world of opportunities. They are bystanders to the processes of modernity, urbanization, globalization and in both cases, average females with no purpose but a strong unidentified intent. This intent is a metaphorical extension of female presence in real urban India where aspirations of the female other half remain unfulfilled due to the expectations of performing utopian roles while simultaneously being

groomed to survive in a largely modern hybrid concoction of values and social change. (59)

While Rani is having nightmares where Vijay is reiterating his decision to not to marry her, he appears in the form of a bus conductor. So this ideology is not exclusive to Vijay's category but is an all-pervasive phenomenon.

Rani, in order to escape from the questioning glares, decides to take this trip. It is rather an acutely bold step that she has taken up, considering her inexperience. She has less knowledge and even lesser confidence at the start of her journey. Getting easily scared and panicky is usual to her personality. Rani travels around the city but feels lonely and indulges in self-pity. She is constantly reminded of Vijay who would have been with her, had the marriage solemnised. Rani's running away from the Eiffel Tower is a sign of her running away from her misery, memories, and reality. To top her already miserable experience, there is an attempt of robbery on her. She plans to go back to India and bring her trip to premature termination. She is distraught, lonely, and scared.

The turning point in her stay comes when she lands into a club by chance and instead of water, beer is poured down her throat. She gets intoxicated and loosens up; dancing to her heart's content, narrating her tale of woes in Hindi to strangers who listen to her intently; although not understanding a single word. Rani's dance is a vengeful dance of freedom and she begins to feel relieved, enjoying herself. Rani unleashes years of repression in her long speech, which is a monologue and very crucial to the story as it sheds light on her character through self-presentation. Her outpouring is therapeutic as she has an audience who listens to her. For her, the rejection in marriage is a terribly bad incident that has ruined her whole life. As per her opinion, being obedient is a quality required in the making of a 'good girl' and lying, cheating, wearing short skirts are the signs of a 'bad girl' ("*Queen*" 00:52:50). Her views establish her as an obedient, conventional, and traditional girl who is limited in her diminished knowledge of the world. Her ideology is in consensus with her character impression developed till now. She warns Vijaylaxmi against having physical relations with strangers.

A contrast between her present and past experiences is shown through flashbacks. Her life with Vijay was regulated and monitored where she was not

permitted to dance, mingling with boys, wearing clothes of her choice or even burping. She never resisted to this regulation and never thought it to be objectionable either. Here in Paris, she is discovering herself by doing what her heart desired and without any sort of restriction. While in the beginning, Rani is heartbroken and still attached to Vijay, she gradually has several encounters that remind her that while her feelings about the rejection are genuine and legitimate, being rejected does not mean that she cannot explore her full potential. West has had a positive influence also for primarily the women belonging to the middle class and upper-middle class. Rani not only discovers her identity, freedom, and self-worth in a distant land, she is also helped in doing so by the people from other cultures and traditions.

It is interesting to note that in Hindi films, many popular forms of self-expression exist because of their Western origin, associated with taboo, for example, western dresses, public display of affection and gender equality. Madhva M. Prasad defines this class space, in which characters are free to enact their subjectivity without any external scrutiny and judgment as ‘necessary’ (181). *Queen* displays a certain level of necessity of such space as well. In *Queen*, this space required is outside India, and that makes matters a little complicated. Ultimately, it is Rani’s journey through Europe that empowers her with a mode of the agency that she lacked previously. So, for accurate analysis of her mode of empowerment, an analysis of the space is also indispensable. *Queen* takes a slightly unusual approach and the majority of the film is shot in Paris and Amsterdam. Foreign destinations provide ‘some sort of privacy for the romantic couple’ (Dwyer and Patel 59), in addition to ‘representing utopias of consumption for a range of lifestyle opportunities and consumerist behaviour (59). Gradually, Rani’s character deconstructs the necessity of couple; so as such, this notion does not play a role when assessing the function of foreign or the idea of Utopia. Paris, as Rani experienced it initially was far from Utopian, when she fails to perform simple tasks like crossing the road or ordering the food. *Queen* takes the concept of space but introduces it as Other than Utopia. The Cultural exchange and the encounter that follows is not a very familiar trope in Hindi films, where foreign locations usually serve to fulfil fantasies. *Queen* turns these notions upside down by simple voyeuristic picturization. This becomes quite evident when she meets to go Rukhsar in a brothel in Amsterdam. But there such spaces serve as ‘transgressive

spaces'. Dwyer states: "Such sequences allow the visitors forbidden pleasure which is eventually disavowed by the narrative" (112). On the contrary, the brothel in Amsterdam's red-light district is shown to be a woman's place where they dance, party, and appear to be in control of their bodies. This brothel does not qualify as a place of transgression; instead serves as a place of exotic Otherness, which adds to Rani's enlightening encounters, contributing to her development as a mature person. Paris and Amsterdam are not Utopian for Rani, but she learns various valuable life lessons by engaging with the Otherness that the foreign is shown to be. At this same time, the film also raises feminist questions regarding women and prostitution. There are two existing views on this. One view is that such places involve objectification and exploitation; other is that the woman must be free to choose the ways to express her sexuality.

Rani takes an important leap in her personality growth through her friendship with Vijaylaxmi, a girl of part Indian descent she meets in Paris. Vijaylaxmi calls herself Vijay for short and for consoling Rani says, "if not Vijay, then at least Vijaylaxmi is there" ("*Queen*" 01:15:40). Nickname Vijay makes her a remarkable replacement for Rani's now ex-fiancé Vijay. Vijaylaxmi is a single mother; who from a traditional Indian perspective has a rather unfortunate social position. Despite being the unusual case, Vijaylaxmi is projected to be a wholesome person; independent, assertive, and joyful. Vijaylaxmi comes like a breeze of fresh air to Rani's life and offers her space where women like Rani who are raised in an orthodox environment can breathe a sigh of relief. With her, Rani not only succeeds in conquering her insecurities but also her prejudices about being single, having pre-marital sex, alcoholism, un-ladylike behaviour, and having children outside of marriage. Also, here she comes face to face with her self-confidence and the ability of self-expression. Vijaylaxmi is a mixed-blood woman, not purely Indian. This could have been shown to pacify the conservative viewers who could attribute her 'hippie' and wild lifestyle to her mixed ethnicity. To such an audience, Vijaylaxmi does not pose any threat to their traditional beliefs; rather is viewed as liberated, unrestrained, and exotic beauty in a foreign land. Vijaylaxmi's influence on Rani is profound and enduring as it aids in the destabilisation of the conventional and domineering order. As per the traditionalists' perception, this influence presumably will not last on the personality of

Rani by a woman like Vijaylaxmi, who was an outsider. After having lived in the company of Vijaylaxmi, Rani emerges to be a liberated, uncontrolled, and independent woman, not afraid of walking down the dark alleys, taking her own decisions or considering herself a self-sufficient entity. She reciprocates to Vijaylaxmi by extending some of her advises, like warning her against having physical relations with strangers.

Rani maintains a subtle equilibrium by refusing to be intimidated physically or emotionally and encompassing her sexuality at the same time. She is refusing to act her cultural gender duty, wrapped in the values of which she has spent her entire life. She tries to retain her modesty and yet makes efforts to revive Vijaylaxmi through the traditional cultural lens about the consequences of leading a life which is though adventures, yet devoid of conviction, stability, and faith.

Afterward, both Vijaylaxmi and Rani, digress from their common paths to undertake their independent steps towards self-awareness. Embarking on their journeys is again the Western trope where the individual self is prioritised over social self, in the exact opposite to the Indian tradition. Both Rani and Vijaylaxmi's attempt to explore themselves relates itself to the Western individualistic tradition strictly. Since space plays a crucial role in the film, it is pertinent to mention that *Queen* emerges as a film about the Indian belief system profiting from Western traditions. The fact that Rani leaves Vijaylaxmi behind and continues her journey further emphasises that she has become self-confident enough to pursue her journey forward and would not allow anything to be a hindrance to that plan, not even her bonding with Vijaylaxmi. This idea is further demonstrated as the story continues and Rani, after having boarded the train to Amsterdam, receives calls from Vijay which she discontinues. This action of Rani is in complete contrast to the disposition she has had in the film till now. Since the beginning of the film, Rani had acted to be a weak, subservient and complacent person in front of Vijay. She was the one who always tried to reach out to him and inquire from her parents if they were able to contact Vijay's family. Now, she was thwarting the attempt of Vijay to talk to her. Rani's changing stand hints at the cues that would restructure the new version of Rani's character.

After her departure from Paris, Rani reaches Amsterdam, where she checks into a backpacker's hostel. Though she has become more confident and self-assured, yet the idea of sharing her room with three male strangers is very revolting to her. She makes an attempt to find another place to stay, but realising that all the affordable places in Amsterdam are booked, she returns to the hostel and agrees to stay in the allotted room, though having her mental reservations. Rani's proximity to three men of different nationalities including Taka (Japanese), Tim (French) and Oleksander (Russian) indirectly comments on the men Rani has been acquainted with since the time she was born. In India, men are labelled to be either saviours or a threat to women; these chivalrous and cultured men respect a woman's individuality, preference, freedom, and space. These men are fun, courteous, caring and far away from patriarchal stereotypes, Rani has been accustomed to back home. She roams the streets of Amsterdam with her new friends day and night. She even visits a sex shop with them. This wandering becomes a well-defined negotiation of global identities in the city none of them belongs to. Rani has gathered much courage during her stay in France, and now she is seen holding the city map with conviction, finding her way with the things and exploring new places.

In a very crucial turn of events, Rani meets an Italian chef, with whom her first meeting turns out to be quite a disaster. While visiting his restaurant, although she talks to the chef/owner with confidence, yet she has to kind of run away from the place as the chef is very passionate about his cooking and not receptive to any kind of criticism which Rani unknowingly does. Rani has always had a keen desire to work but was not 'permitted' by Vijay to do so, but when the chef offers her the chance to take part in a cooking competition, she leaps up the opportunity at the persuasion of her friends Taka and Oleksander. This reflects that in the past, Rani had taken her quality of obedience too far, even to the extent of losing her rights to her own life. Rani's *Golgappa* stall is successful, and it is her first foray into employment and entrepreneurship. The cook, who begins as an intimidating and patronising personality, eventually becomes a medium for Rani to explore her cooking skills and receive an opportunity to compete at the international level. Her kissing the chef is devoid of any romantic sentiments, nor they share any romantic relationship; instead, the kiss serves as a moment where Rani fully displays her assertiveness and new

found self-worth. Rani is prompted to take up the challenge and sportingly kisses Marcello, the chef to prove the point that Indians are good at everything. Rani's gesture leaves the Indian viewers shocked as they do not perceive her personality to be so daring. Ratna Kapur's perception regarding the repressed sexuality of Indian women seems apt: "In India, motherhood, wifehood, domesticity, marriage, chastity, purity, and self-sacrifice constitute the primary features of normative sexuality" (56). Another critic Brinda Bose further cements Kapur's opinion that with the changing socio-cultural ethics, a trend to challenge the established modes of sexuality are developing and "contemporary controversies around sex/sexuality are proof that sex is no longer seen solely as a negative, contaminating force that needs to be contained, while the re-conceptualisation of sexual speech and expression as a right has simultaneously posed a Cultural challenge as well" (3). The cooking competition was not a medium to reflect the supremacy of the Indian cuisine; rather, the competition acts as a reminder of the traditional faultless duties Indian women are expected to perform in order to achieve the label of being ideal Indian women. The event occurs as a link between the culinary expertise and self-validation. Even though Rani had been an assistant at her father's sweet shop, yet she was never assumed to be a natural successor to the business due to her gender.

To Rani's surprise, she sees Vijay waiting for her while coming back from the competition. Rani does not seem to be too pleased to see him and retains a normal expression. That reflects her having overcome the obsession of Vijay. The tone in which Rani talks to Vijay was unheard of by Vijay and he is seemingly taken aback by her behaviour. Rani's gestures and body language depict that she is not much interested in pursuing a conversation with Vijay and has other better things to do. He is amazed by her friendship with Tim, Taka and Oleksander. He states, "Champagne isn't alcohol? Champagne isn't alcohol? (louder) You've gone crazy, you've started drinking? Rani what is... these people must have taught you to drink, right? You, where did you find such hippie kind of friends?" ("*Queen*" 02:04:10).

Another hypocrisy that *Queen* exposes is the notion of modernity. When Rani meets Vijay wearing a Western dress, he is pleased to see her in that attire and calls her 'modern' and all the while when she wore Indian clothes, she was 'not his type'. It was Rani's photo in 'modern' clothes that propelled Vijay's passion in pursuit of



Rani across the continent. Rani's modernity is not superficial. She attempts to maintain a delicate balance between two diverse cultures by subtly enforcing her autonomy. This modernity also resists Vijay's advancements, which have the backing of his family. On the contrary, Vijay's modernity relies on outer appearances, and not on its liberal values, to enhance his social status.

Vijay tries to put Rani in an apologising position by accusing her of drinking and roaming around with strangers, 'hippies'. He tries to subjugate her by referring to the consequences if his mother gets to know about Rani's involvement with these strangers whom Rani calls her friends. He tries to allure her into the old fold as if nothing has happened, promising her that everything will be sorted out. As he tries to get over-possessive, Oleksander watching from a distance takes it to be an abuse of Rani and gets into an altercation with Vijay. Vijay's self-pride is severely bruised, and he pleads with Rani to come along, to which Rani declines. He pleads:

I am sorry with your friends yesterday; they were getting very aggressive. And you don't know these foreigners. I live in London. They are very weird. I was only... I was feeling protective. And obviously, I'm your fiancé if I won't then who would? And whatever the expenditure has been, that papa would handle. There had been a lot from your side as well. I know, even you wouldn't be able to live without me. Suddenly, because of me, everything got ruined ("*Queen*" 02:10:44).

Rani does not think herself to be answerable to Vijay and conveys how she lives is none of his business. She asserts herself by making a declarative statement about having some urgent work, meeting him the next day and departing. Vijay is absolutely amazed at her display of newfound self-confidence when they meet the next day in a restaurant. He is astonished at Rani's ability to interact with people and her self confidence. Rani chooses to ignore the key concerns of Vijay and rather emphasises on how beautiful the city is. Vijay is flabbergasted and apologises for his actions, seeing it to be the only likely solution. He confesses that everything got ruined because of him. Rani interrupts him and says that she has to leave for a rock show. He is astonished at her priority of going for a rock show than spending time with him. Rani states that rock show is not important, but her friends are. Vijay is absolutely

baffled and wonders if Rani is leaving him for those friends. She leaves the table and leaves Vijay there; baffled, paralysed, and calling her name after her. Rani is joyous because it is for the first time that she has given importance to her own decision.

Immediately, the title *Queen* comes out of its conservative construct and evolves with a modern interpretation where the Queen is modern, independent and liberal. Rani's advancement from an oppressed and traditional woman to that of a woman who is independent is a story of evolution which was possible due to the western notion of independence and freedom and her traditional wisdom and outlook.

After having come back to India, Rani's look is in stark contrast to when she had left for Paris. Her walk is uninhibited and full of self-confidence. From the airport to her way back home, she asks her father to drop her at Vijay's house. His mother tries to convince her that she was extremely bothered about her whereabouts. Rani leaves her aghast by asking her if she was so concerned, why she never gave her a call. Vijay is overjoyed to see Rani and hugs her. She hugs him back, but after a short while, returns him his engagement ring, symbolising any last hope of reunion that Vijay had. He is stunned and asks her not to do it, Rani hugs him again and saying 'Thank You' leaves the place. Vijay follows her, calls her name, but she is out of reach now. Rani is now capable of taking her decisions, and for her decision to snap her relationship with Vijay; she did not seek anyone's approval. She smiles and walks off with self-assured gait, free from bondage. Manasvini Rai, in her analysis of the movie, writes:

Primarily, the film shows the journey of one female character from a state of being caged or oppressed by society's norms, towards finding freedom and empowerment in a vague sense. It is an individual journey and not a movement of any kind. The problem is made clear. But what appears to be lacking are more films that attempt to find workable solutions that can contribute to the emancipation of all women. (1)

*Queen* depicts the journey of a woman, finding herself through the power of courage, time, new experiences, and friendship. The film can be termed to be the journey of a woman from being dependent on one man for her emotional fulfilment to being accountable for her own life. The film raises several questions in the context of women-Indian women in particular. Is it required that a woman needs to wear western

dress and boots, straighten her hair in order to be liberated? If so, then why? Is the transformation natural or artificial? Must her heart be broken to realise her self-worth? Other relevant concerns also emerge. Why the two protagonists Rani and Vijyalaxmi are thin and stereotypically beautiful? Has she got to kiss, dance in dance bar and drink in order to liberate herself? And finally, why it is through her beauty and modernisation that Rani is able to seduce Vijay and not her mind and spirit? Why it is that when an opportunity comes her way, it has to be a cooking competition?

Nonetheless, the film effectively touches upon the idea of love and friendship and deliberates how far it is alright for a woman to lose herself in it. The message is quite evident that falling in love must not result in losing one's identity. The film also comments about the class of men who can be funny, gentle, and thoughtful; and they can be chauvinistic, misogynistic, and judgemental too. Also, that they can seek the permission of women too, or they can run for their lives by finding a lizard in their room. It is predictable that now Rani will be fine. What about the emancipation of other women in the film? Both Vijay's and Rani's mothers and Rani's friend Sonal who is insanely busy with rearing her kids and looking after her household chores. They probably have resigned to their fates and have no wish to be emancipated.

Visibly, there is a dire need for more Hindi films that resist the desire to indulge in the hackneyed depiction of women. Such films need not just tell a story but take up the issue of how feminist problems can be resolved. The change in the narrative of *Queen* represents the germination of coming of age of postmodern heroine, who for a long span of time was tied with the heavy burden of carrying the tradition and collective social conscience. Such films are also creating alternative journeys for the female protagonists and permitting interpretation of traditions and values from her perspective while in a foreign land. It is a reality that a large number of women are oblivious of their potential and talent, resulting in the low self-esteem of themselves due to the social constraints and fearing to shatter their domestic peace. Their domestic responsibilities often preclude them from leaving their homes behind. Identity formation in *Queen* is the central concept of the film. Identity is a form of self-expression and articulation is necessary for the construction of identity formation. With the postmodernisation, women became more aware of their importance in the institution of marriage and sought equality in a man-woman relationship. Most of the

educated and urbane women are not willing to internalise the concept of submission in marriage and other social relationships. Such women have stressed on the importance of self-definition as part of a journey from victimisation to a liberated mind. This journey of self-realisation confronts the power dynamics and rejects externally defined images of ideal womanhood. Existing power arrangements actually feel threatened by the progression of such an emergent woman. Visual media has always been accused of misrepresenting and objectifying women while using the phallogocentric nature, but *Queen* stands as an exception to all the above-mentioned notions.

Through her journey, Rani discovers the joy of being true to oneself; the joy of breaking free. She learns to cherish life and to live on her own terms. Her newfound experience directs her to inner reserves of her strength and will power that she never knew existed. In her quest for identity, she moves from darkness to light; from despair to hope and from self-denial to self-acknowledgment. Her struggle throughout the film has been to attain wholeness, completeness, and authentic selfhood. It is a vicious circle of subjugation and manipulation that Rani breaks, and in her success audience finds hope. Viewers rejoice as they witness an unconventional ending where happiness for the protagonist is not measured in terms of 'happily ever after' with the man she loves, rather depends on her own unquestioned and unbiased happiness for the woman. The film raises a question like why should marriage be the end of the road for a young Indian woman. Why she cannot dream of travelling the world and exploring her dreams but rather live with a sole dream of ultimately getting married to the highest-earning groom. *Queen* challenges all these notions and raises many interesting questions raised earlier.

The beauty of the film is its pauses, its silences, and its not saying too much when it can say less. Rani, hurt and angry almost ran away from the mess around her and has a mental process which she is allowed the dignity of. With his tremendous craft of creating and representing such an enchanting character, Vikas Bahl allows the woman to emerge from the turmoil as a 'New Woman', in her own way, on her own terms, declining to perform the identity she has been assigned; rather her having chosen.

## Chapter 7

### Resistance to the Power and the Notion of New Depthlessness in *Mom*

*Mom* (2017), directed by Ravi Udyawar and produced by Zee Studios and Sridevi Productions, marks the 300<sup>th</sup> release of iconic actor Sridevi and one of her last films before her demise on 24 Feb. 2018. The current chapter attempts to analyse the emergence of the New Woman in the film by analysing the protagonist's metamorphosis from a regular school teacher teaching at a Delhi based school to a vengeful mother who avenges her stepdaughter's sexual assault at the hands of perpetrators who believe they can get away with anything without being caught and convicted. For the purpose, Fredric Jameson's notion of new depthlessness and Michel Foucault's idea of Power will be applied as critical concepts. Both new depthlessness and the concept of power have been discussed in detail in previous chapters; hence, an elaborate analysis of the theory will not be given prominence in this chapter. The focus will be more on the applicability of the theories to the film. *Mom* is one such film that portrays the anger and trauma of a woman at being denied justice at the hands of law and how she chooses her own actions at this denial. Applicability of the theories is pertinent here as these notions are the key concepts of postmodern debate and appropriate for conceptual analysis of the film.

Released on 7 July 2017, *Mom* was made in four languages. The film was a commercial success and Sridevi received critical acclaim by the critics and the viewers. Commenting on her performance *The Times of India* states that Sridevi demonstrates why she is the high-priestess of Indian cinema" ("Mom Movie Review"). Sridevi received the award for the Best Actress while A.R. Rahman received the award for Best Background Score during the 65<sup>th</sup> National Film Awards. Sri's award was the first posthumous win in the category. The film grossed Rs. 175.7 crores worldwide, including Rs.110.8 crores in China.

*India Glitz* reviews the film as "*Mom* is like a tale of the fiery tigress, who can do anything in order to protect her cub. It is a taut thriller which deserved to be seen ("Mom Review"). Anna MM Vetticad reviews the film as "Sridevi's acting is wonderful; the actors playing her supportive husband Anand and Arya have

immensely likeable personalities; the use of AR Rahman's music in the first half is effective" (Vetticad). Hindustan Times critiques the film as "*Mom* does fan the audience's anger against people who indulge in anti-women crimes" (Vats). Divya Pal says that because *Mom* is powered by riveting performances from Sridevi and Nawazuddin Siddiqui, you might want to overlook rest of the problems (D Pal). It is also reviewed as "Sridevi-starrer *Mom* is brutal and for the most parts a terrifying yet riveting film. The film deals with the horror and trauma a rape victim experiences and debutant director Ravi Udyawar has done an outstanding job of balancing the drama with an equal amount of shock, thrill, and honest emotions" (Mehta). Uday Bhatia reviews the film as "*Mom* is a strange brew: audience-appeasing thriller, relationship drama, and social commentary all rolled into one" (Bhatia).

It is believed that most of the human beings, at some point of their lives or the other have felt a fit of anger so overpowering that at that particular moment, they wish to kill someone who has caused intense agitation to them, but rarely anyone succumbs to this primal urge. Devki does. Devki is a very popular and vivacious teacher at one of the well-established schools of Delhi. She teaches biology at the school. In the class, a student, Mohit sends an offensive letter to Devki's stepdaughter Arya (Sajal Ali). Out of anger and in order to teach Mohit a lesson, Devki throws his mobile out of the window. Though the action was to snub the mischief creator, yet Arya does not take it in a positive way. When Anand asks Arya her how the day was; she sarcastically indicates towards her mother and says, "Ask her" ("*Mom*" 00:05:30). Arya harbours a very hostile opinion about Devki and despite Devki's efforts to make Arya warm towards her; she remains indifferent and detached from Devki. Their relationship has been depicted to be a conventional step mother-child relationship where the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship are not smooth. When Arya seeks her father's permission for the party and Devki interferes, she retorts, "Do you need Mam's permission for this too?" ("*Mom*" 00:07:27 ). Instead of calling her mom, Arya addresses Devki as Ma'am, to register her dislike and protest. She is not a sullen teenager because she is in that vulnerable stage of life, but because she is coping with the concept of having a stepmother and the changing dynamics of this new setup. Devki never lets any opportunity to pass by to demonstrate her intentions in building an affectionate bond with Arya, but rarely succeeds, as Arya is always suspicious of

her intentions and rebuffing her attempts to build the relationship. She has not been able to forget her deceased mother. When Anand advises her to address Devki as Mom, she states, “You have forgotten my mother, not me” (“*Mom*” 00:10:28).

Tragedy strikes the otherwise smooth life of Sabharwal family when Arya receives an invitation to Valentine’s Day party. Anand (Adnan Siddiqui), Devki’s husband and Arya’s father is reluctant to grant permission, but with Devki’s intervention, allows her to go. He himself is about to fly off to the USA for office-work for ten days. At the party, Arya rejects the advancement of Mohit and his affluent, hotshot friend Charles, as she is interested in someone else. Angered by this public rejection and taking it as an insult to their male sense of superiority, Mohit, Charles, criminal Jagan, and watchman Babu kidnap Arya when she plans to go home. One of her friends had already left the venue, and the other one was intoxicated after being administered a drug-laced drink. Devki runs from pillar to post to get a trace of her daughter, registering an FIR with the local police station, even visiting the party venue to get a clue about her whereabouts, but fails. Meanwhile, the abductors brutally sexually assault Arya and abandon her in a drain alongside the road. They repeatedly chant, “Now call your Mom...Now call your Mom...Shut her mouth...Call your mother” (“*Mom*” 00:36:45) which becomes an adage in the revenge narrative of the film.

Hindi films generally have the tendency to graphically represent the molestation scene in a violent manner, which perhaps is aimed at a sadistic male audience. *Mom*, however, avoids portraying the rape scene in an apparently eye-grabbing style. The story of the sexual assault and its bitter aftermath is set in Delhi. However, Delhi is not a mere backdrop here, assuming a life and character of its own and serves as a milieu in which the culture of impunity thrives and woman is considered to be unsafe. While the film seems to be venturing into the crannies and nooks of the metropolitan to capture its many shades, moral and social, the screenplay steers clear of sensationalism. The narrative gets out of the way of Valentine’s Day kidnap and molestation sequence quickly and without attempting to make it violent and cruel apparently. Yet, the scenes are very suggestive despite not carrying any visual sensationalism. The scenes do not gloat over the outrageous nature of the crime. It is how the survivor is thrown into the gutter is where the sense of shock

stems from. The camera moves with a bird's eye view focusing on the car carrying the perpetrators getting closer to the lifeless girl and stops short of providing the audience with an extreme close up view. As a capsule of agony and unspeakable violence, this is the most striking scene of the film; second only to Devki's distressed cry after seeing her daughter's battered body in the hospital. The next scene shows the lifeless girl dangling between hope and despair. Devki frantically tries to locate her daughter whole night but fails to do so. It is quite late in the morning that she is intimated about the recovery of Arya. Devki has the dual responsibility of taking care of the girl and trying to make sense of what had transpired. She is intimated by the doctor about the condition of Arya:

She's had severe internal injuries. She is still in a state of shock. And, we might have to do multiple surgeries later on because of internal bleeding. She is unable to eat. So we will be feeding her through her Iv. In fact, somebody tried to strangle her to death, because of which her breathing is inconsistent. If she does not stabilise soon, her condition can get critical. To be honest with you, ma'am, your daughter has been physically abused. (*"Mom"* 00:48:56)

Anand is intimated and he aborts his visit to New York in order to be with his family in these trying times. A top-notch CID inspector Mathew (Akshaye Khanna) is assigned the case and he promptly rounds up the criminals and a charge sheet is filed. However, the case falls apart when the trace of liquor is found in the blood of Arya. This fact weakens Arya's case and her memory is assumed to be unreliable. Finally, after a couple of days, Arya records her statement via the video-conferencing in front of the fast-track court. The semen specimen was recovered from the body very late making it difficult to match it with the attackers. She is enquired by the police, "How hard this is for you. But only you can bring them to justice. If you can...!! Arya: Do you know...Do you know what he was screaming? "Now call your mom" (*"Mom"* 00:55:23). For the lack of evidence, all four perpetrators are acquitted by the court. The experience of injustice at the hands of the judiciary prevents Devki from a further appeal to a higher court when advised about the same by the lawyers. Devki realises that she has probably lost Arya forever.



Despite the earnest efforts at the part of Devki to console broken and traumatised Arya, Arya further tears away from her. In the court premises, a detective DK (Nawazuddin Siddiqui) offers the distraught mother unsolicited advice which was declined by Devki. He asserts, “My name is Dayashankar Kapoor, but you can call me DK in short. I am a detective. Private-eye. Don't mind the Police. Dealing with crime every day, they have become thick-skinned. Let me know if I can be of any use to you. No need to hesitate” (*“Mom”* 01:10:25). He boasts that from the ashes of the men, he can deduce his whole life. Devki, suspicious of his appearance and credentials, declines the offer. But eventually, her gutted faith in the police and the law having taken a beating prompts her to take the help of the sleuth she had shooed away earlier. She decides to take the law in her hand and punish the culprits.

From here on, the film takes a stark turn and becomes a rape-revenge drama. It becomes a thriller where a Mom is out to settle scores with a bunch of dangerous men. A father of a teenage girl himself, DK empathizes with Devki and consents to help her as Devki seeks revenge for Arya. The first to be eliminated is the watchman. For the purpose, Devki also asks for from her former transgender pupils who seduce the watchman and drug him. The next morning, he wakes up to the fact that he has been castrated and goes mad with disbelief; smashing his head onto the bathroom floor and dying instantly. Devki breaks into the house of another culprit Charles and blends apple seed powder, a form of poison, into his health supplements, leaving him paralysed. When his cousin Mohit, another culprit visits Charles in the hospital, Devki plants apple seeds and other evidence in his house. All the while, Devki is supported by DK in locating the culprits. Charles’ health deteriorates, and Mohit is convicted for the murder. Arya follows the news of the taking down of each of the culprit but is clueless about the identity of the person doing it, as she believes that her father could be behind it.

Arya’s cold conduct towards Devki continues as she is absolutely non-recipient to her step-mother’s advances to break the ice between them. She remains deeply grateful to her father and is oblivious of the fact that it is Devki who has gone to the extent of being a murderer to avenge her. Police also suspect Anand to be involved in the murders, but even after having chased him intently, they fail to gather any proof against him. The breakthrough to the thriller comes when Mathew finds

Devki's glasses at the house of Mohit, affirming her involvement in the murders. Mathew confronts Devki and offers her glasses to which she takes out her own (another) pair of glasses from her bag and gives an enigmatic and meaningful smile. Devki feigns ignorance and projects herself to be oblivious of the proceedings around. Nonetheless, he warns Devki about the fourth accused being a hardened criminal, not like other high profile accused. It will be dangerous to go after him. Charles, not dead yet, reveals to fourth accused Jagan that Devki is retaliating and trapping them one by one. Mad with fury, Jagan corners DK and after extracting the information regarding whereabouts of Devki, kills him. Devki was at a snow cottage at Kufri with her family, in order to take Arya out of the traumatic environment. Meanwhile, Mathew discovers a hidden camera in DK's glasses. He is apprised about all the events that happened right from the beginning. Anticipating some kind of tragedy to occur, he leaves for Kufri to save Devki and her family.

Indeed, there is a serious scuffle going on. Jagan has reached the destination and cut the power of the cottage. He shoots at Anand. Distracting the attacker, Devki tells Arya to run for her life. This way, Devki puts her own life in danger to save Arya. Devki pulls a gun on Jagan but is intercepted by Mathew. He tells her if she would kill Jagan, she will be going to jail. That is not required, as Anand has survived the bullet attack and has been hospitalised. Arya hiding behind the bushes overhears when Mathew angrily narrates how Devki killed the rest of the accused. Arya is astounded to hear that as she could never expect Devki to go to such an extent for her. Devki does not relent, as she is aware that if she hangs the gun, Jagan will come after their lives again. At this very critical juncture, inciting morality debate, Mathew holds her over his own gun to kill Jagan. Devki is reluctant yet determined, hanging between the extremes. Dramatically enough, Devki shoots down Jagan after hearing Arya addressing her as 'mom' and hugs her 'daughter' with intense emotions. The film's first half seems authentic and heart-wrenching as it makes effort to ascertain the mother-child relationship between the duo and the physical exploitation of Arya with the utmost sensitivity, and the family's struggle to internalise the tragedy. The storyline takes an absolutely stark turn when Devki sets out on her approval inducing storm of killings. Hers is not an act committed in self-defence or heat of the moment violence; rather, it is a carefully crafted revenge. This is usually addressed as *Zakhmi*

*Aurat* trope, where women who have been wronged in some way or another and are disillusioned by the system, take an illegal route to avenge for themselves or some other close woman. Vengeful women in Hindi cinema have not been a regular phenomenon, whereas men full of sense of revenge have been a common sight in such cinema for decades, overthrowing law when it fails them. Speaking on the artistic level, both are clichés, but there is no equivalence between both on a sociological level. The same baggage of off-screen prejudice is not carried by the unrealistically vengeful man on screen, as the women have to.

Sexual violence unabatedly continues to be a social reality of postmodern day India. In 2017, the National Crimes Record Bureau published a report stating that over 250000 crimes such as eve-teasing, kidnapping, and rape were committed (“Crimes Against Women”). The gang-rape and death of a 23-year-old medical student in Delhi exemplifies the statistics. The incident generated a massive amount of wrath and discontentment in the minds of people resulting in better sexual assault laws (Chamberlaine and Bhabhani). Yet, it is believed that a large number of such incidents go unreported due to the stigma associated and lack of sensitivity on the part of police and judiciary (Mukherji 4072). Manohar and Kline discuss the sexual assault and portrayal of women in Hindi cinema as:

The aftermath of sexual assault in India is shaped by the patriarchal norm which stresses women’s chastity and the belief that a woman’s honour (*izzat*) is lost after sexual assault. Rape in India is construed by the society as the loss of a woman’s honour, which stigmatizes the assaulted woman more than her perpetrators. In India, rape represents a violation of the woman’s chastity and honour rather than a physical violation of her person, her right to bodily integrity, the security of the person, and freedom from violence. Loss of honour leads to a stigmatization of the victim by society as well as by her family and severely affects the chances of securing an alliance for marriage. (237)

Other not so overt forms of sexual exploitation like eve-teasing continue to exist and always not reported to the authorities (Dutt).

The Hindi film industry has generally been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against women for decades. Generally, the preconditions of such an assault

involve young unmarried males sexually assaulting females who have assumed traditional gender roles. Usually, the victims themselves are held responsible for such an assault for the lack of balanced social perspectives and consequent social damage to the image of the victim. The assault itself is depicted as the perpetrators combining sexual, verbal, and physical assault actions. The aftermath of such an assault depicts the victim suffering from stigma or losing her life, while the perpetrators get killed either by the victim herself or her family members or at times remain unprosecuted. Indian feminists, in particular, opine that Hindi films push young adults into pre-marked gender roles and produce scripts that induce environment to conduct to commit violence against women (Dasgupta et al. 211). Studies conducted regarding the female sexual harassment in Hindi films conclude that 56% of the films produced during the 1980s and 1990s display sexual harassment of the women (Dasgupta 178; Derne 556). A study of the films in the late 1990s and early 2000s reveals that almost 40% of the films investigated the sexual harassment of the women (Ramasubramanian and Oliver 330).

Hindi cinema often reflects the prominent ideas of body polity that it addresses. The film's success largely depends on how viewing masses relate themselves to the themes and ideas around which the film revolves. With postmodern times, cinema also underwent transformation while addressing and negotiating these changes. Certain themes and motifs have been recurrent; though modified and altered with changing times. Motherhood, love friendship, deceit, hatred, family bonding, and the victory of good over evil have been persistent themes in the Hindi cinema. These motifs get excessively repeated because of belonging to the shared common consciousness that has its roots in literary and oral narratives of folklore, legend, and myth handed over from one generation to another over the ages. The recurrence of these themes in cinema has been modified to suit the changing social circumstance.

The theme of revenge is one such recurring theme in mainstream Hindi cinema. In the consciousness of the majority of the Indian audience, the archetypal avenging hero/heroine is present in the great Indian epics. In the past, as well as in the present mass perception, the majority of the Indian festivals represent a resounding victory of good over evil, and the core ideas to these celebrations are that the honour of the woman is the community's honour and it is the supreme obligation of the man,

his dignity and his manliness, to 'preserve' this honour. This 'chivalrous' conduct is not unique to the Indian subcontinent, but prevalent across the cultures. *Draupadi* is a classical symbol of revenge, where she keeps her hair untied, vows it tie only after drenching it in the blood of *Dussashasan*, the Kaurav brothers who dared to attempt to play with her dignity and disrobe her. Commenting on the debate on the status of sexual violence in the contemporary feminist theory, Carine M. Mardorossian, in her essay *Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape* (2002) states:

Contemporary feminist theory, by contrast, tends to ignore the topic of rape in favour of more ambivalent expressions of male domination such as pornography and sexual harassment. The kind of theoretical and genealogical scrutiny that other aspects of women's lives (the body, gender performativity, eating disorders, transgender politics, etc.) have occasioned is remarkably absent from studies of sexual violence. Rape has become academia's under-theorised and apparently untheorisable issue. (743)

Mardorossian seeks to understand this phenomenon and seeks to find a solution in alternative feminist theories., i.e., that denies the validity of existing premises and established 'truths' but problematises them by asking alternative questions and offering different conceptions' (745).

Quite often, a rape scene is inserted in the narrative for a voyeuristic male audience, regardless of the need of doing so or lack of it. Sangeeta Dutta, in her article *Globalisation and Representation of Women in Hindi Cinema* (2000), elucidates on equating rape and revenge scenes and the mechanistic underpinning of these scenes:

Criminalising rape identifies with a progressive position but at the same time induces the voyeuristic pleasure prompted in the cinematic representations of rape. These films remind us to reconsider the limits and possibilities of equating rape-revenge scenes and the masochistic underpinning of the rape in this genre. These revenge films retain the rule of targeting modern urban women as victims - fashion models, college teachers, newlywed wives, policewomen. The metaphor of the city and the criminal/ psychopath lurking in the streets doubly exposes the vulnerability and the threatened or real violation of these. (75)

Usually, such victims are a sister or sister-in-law of the hero with whom he does not have a romantic involvement. Unable to bear the stigma associated with such an event, the hero usually swears vengeance on her body. On the contrary, if the female lead, even abducted, remains pious and pure in order for the hero to save her. But the films have witnessed departure from the theme. In 1935, *Hunterwali* revolved around a lady who punished the rich, atrocious men while protecting the poor, played by an Australian actress Mary Evans. The film was the highest grosser of the time.

Released in 1978, *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* featuring Zeenat Aman, is termed to be the classic in the rape-revenge genre. The film revolved around two sisters assaulted by the same man. The film ends with the elder sister shooting the culprit and attaining justice that was denied to them by the judiciary. In the court, cynical male advocates manipulate the system in order to get the convicts acquitted, highlighting the failure of the judiciary to impart justice to the victims. The film succeeded in initiating the debate on rape trials in the public domain. Three films released in 1988 viz. *Sherni*, *Zakhmi Aurat*, and *Khoon Bhari Maang* brought the image of an avenging woman to the forefront. *Khoon Bhari Maang*, a very unusual title for a film implies a meaningful connotation. Partition in the hair of Hindu women, filled with sindoor refers to a lifelong association of husband and wife. It is a kind of Cultural code that hints at domestic fulfilment and peace. It is symbolic of their mutual caring, sharing, and understanding. But if this *Maang* (partition) is filled with *Khoon* (Blood) instead of *sindoor*, then it is indicative of larger trouble, of the woman having transgressed into a world that is not necessarily hers, and committing actions which are not predictable to her otherwise docile temperament. The film is about a traditional, married woman Aarti (Rekha) who is devastated when she loses her husband in a terrible accident, mustering up her strength to go with the flow of life with the support of her father. Sanjay, aided by Aarti's friend Nandini, marries Aarti out of greed when her father passes away. She is thrown to crocodiles by Sanjay and Nandini but rescued. Her death not being conclusive as her body was never discovered; Sanjay is not able to inherit her property. Nandini returns with a new identity and a prettier face with the help of plastic surgery. She lures Sanjay and kills him, not before dramatically revealing her identity to him.

The film apparently runs on a commonly accepted notion that an innocent housewife is not appealing, whereas a stunningly beautiful woman is doom in disguise. Such a notion perhaps finds its roots in patriarchal anxieties about enticing, alluring, and possibly destructive capability of a woman that may be hidden behind her exterior appeal. In Aarti's case too, her beauty lies in her inner strength, not on cosmetically improved appearance. *Maatr* (2017), like *Mom*, is a rape-revenge film, where Raveena Tandon plays the role of avenging matriarch who brings her and her daughter's rapists to a dead end. Like Devki of *Mom*, Vidya of *Maatr* disillusioned with the system takes law in her hand and avenges the rape by killing the perpetrators. Both the court and police are depicted to be utterly ineffectual and corrupt. As a genre, rape-revenge has a lot of scope of physical dexterity, drama, histrionics, and being able to act as a 'Hero'. The latter being the most appealing to the audience, going by the roles most actresses get to perform otherwise in the films. However, the storylines either seem to have stayed the same as in the previous decades, or they have regressed slightly. The bloodthirst of the audience seems to have gone higher as they witness the scenes of horrendous crime with much eagerness in the film. In *Maatr*, unlike *Mom*, Vidya suffers not only at the hands of the system, but also her husband, who divorces her shortly after the death of their daughter. *Zakhmi Aurat*, released in 1988, is a film in which Dimple Kapadia playing Kiran, a policewoman who joins forces with rape survivors like her to get justice. The film came up with a much more shocking way than other films for tackling the offenders. Directed by Avtar Bhogal, the film dared to suggest a horrifying punishment of castrating the perpetrators and making them face social humiliation for having ruined a girl's life. The film was bold enough for the audience used to watching only Doordarshan as a channel. It was still a rare, courageous, and unapologetic attempt proposing an unusual solution. The film was released about three decades back, yet the message it conveyed perhaps failed to reach the people in power or judiciary, continuing with the denial of justice to sufferers, resulting in films like *Maatr* and *Mom*.

In all such films, including *Sherni* (1988), *Zakhmi Aurat* (1988), *Khoon Bhari Maang* (1988), *Bandit Queen* (1994), *Pink* (2016), *Maatr* (2017), and *Mom* (2017), the hero was a wronged woman seeking retribution and revenge. In *Mom* and such other several films, the victim becomes vengeful not only against the culprits who

victimise her but against all the misogynistic judicial system. Lalitha Gopalan, in her essay *Avenging Women in Indian Cinema* (2003), transports the reader to the decade of emergency in Indian society, when the depiction of rape and sexual assault became a norm in Hindi cinema- due to the failed state aggravating the misery of already subjugated women, “Courtrooms play a significant role in these films, if only to demonstrate the State’s inability to convict the rapist” (87). She also highlights the fact how the tragic protagonists were usually named as ‘Bharati,’ an allegory for mother India. Precedence was set to use the dishonour of a woman as associated with dishonouring of her kin, although the depiction of scenes of rape was much less prevalent.

These films examine the ramifications of rape; the fact that it is nothing but the assertion of male power and aggression. The trial in court turns out to be equally torturous for the victims both literally and figuratively, the prime aim of which is to punish the culprit. Usually convicts conveniently walk-off for the lack of evidence against them. The victim not only faces social ostracism in most of the cases but also the acute stigma, depression, and trauma in the aftermath. The equally horrifying experience for victims is when the culprits go scot-free. The film centres on the victim’s narrative, not much requirement has been felt to elaborate upon the culprits’ life and personality apart from the fact that they belong to a ‘normal’, mostly well to do families.

The narrative structure of the film relies on the two possible responses to rape. First, the court trials and legal proceedings become a farce. Second, the film glamorises direct action bypassing the law; usually killing of the perpetrator by the female lead followed by an ultimate victory in court. In the film, Arya fades out of the view quickly; it is likely because of the fidelity the film shows to the rape-revenge drama template. For the victims, sexual assault in such movies is shown to be the end of the world. A dialogue from the film states, “There can be no worse punishment than living with the experience, and only justified action is death penalty” (qtd. from *Mom*, 2017). Surprisingly, such a flawed and simplistic solution has never been challenged by the filmmakers who are keener on providing a cathartic solution to the problem.



Considering the diversity in Foucauldian theory, there are many respects in which the social thought of Michel Foucault is the rich source for feminist theory. The debate on feminist theory takes up a Foucault's major philosophical tenets, especially those concerning the production and expression of power and application of these tenets to feminist problems, usually resulting in crucial new insights. In one of the roundtable discussions in 1977 that Foucault is quoted asking a question, "Why isn't rape the same as a punch in the face?" (Henderson 225) advising that the rape crime ought to be defined merely as an act of violence, not of sexuality, and not distinct from other types of assaults. And it was this claim made by Foucault which ushered in an immediate and sustained tremor in feminist intellectual circles. He essentially supported decriminalisation of sexual offense and suggested it be treated as justice like any other offense:

One can always produce the theoretical discourse that amounts to saying: in any case, sexuality can in no circumstances be the object of punishment. And when one punishes rape one should be punishing physical violence and nothing but that. And to say that it is nothing more than an act of aggression: that there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex . . . There are problems [if we are to say that rape is more serious than a punch in the face], because what we're saying amounts to this: sexuality as such, in the body, has a preponderant place, the sexual organ isn't like a hand, hair, or a nose. It therefore has to be protected, surrounded, invested in any case with legislation that isn't that pertaining to the rest of the body.... It isn't a matter of sexuality, it's the physical violence that would be punished, without bringing in the fact that sexuality was involved. (Foucault, *Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison*, 200)

The roundtable conference concerned, among other matters, his work in *Discipline and Punish* (1979). Women who were present at the conference and subsequent feminist thinkers negatively and vehemently rejected the claim stated above. Foucault asserted that desexualisation of rape would act as a liberating blow against the disciplining discourse which constructed sexuality as a means of social and political

power. Laura Hengehold debating about the issue of rape in Foucauldian theory states:

His suggestion that rape law punishes "just the violence" in rape, leaving the "sex" free of state interference, engages him with ongoing feminist debates regarding strategic legal and educational perspectives on sexual violence, but also implicitly suggests that rape law should protect the sexual expression of rapists before that of their victims. In fact, Foucault's theoretical work detailing the interdependence of coercion, discipline, and the production of truthful discourse in the exercise of state and social power provides the basis for a more thoughtful analysis of rape and rape law than the philosopher himself seems to grant in this case. Rather than separate the "sex" from the "violence," one might expect a Foucauldian analysis of rape to investigate the ways in which rape and rape trial process reinforce a discursive formation in which women are made to appear less coherent than the men from whom they are differentiated by their status as victims. (89)

Most of the ideas on sexuality propounded by Foucault stirred controversy, like the one stated above, giving way to debate on dynamics of power, sexuality, and hegemony. The desexualisation strategy of Foucault has been pursued by radical feminists as well, though the reasons for doing the same differ. It was controversial to classify rape just an act of violence as it "ignores the potential impact of rape as a practice-not just a criminological category" (Heyes 5). The feminists categorise Foucault's micro-level ideology of sexual violence as constructive. But it is on the macro-level relations in the society that reinforce the ideas like gender inequality and gender-based violence. As per Henderson, in Foucault's account, "the patriarchal structures that underpin rapes are left unacknowledged" (231), so his theory alone is insufficient. However, indeed, the sexual subjugation occurs at the micro-level also, targeting individual bodies and sexualities, hence authenticating the requirement of analysing both micro and macro level exercises of power. Though some critics advocate as "power originating outside of and independent of concrete social interactions" (Martin 19), yet at the same time, an investigation of the political nature

of the interpersonal relations is emphasised. Though the feminists are primarily concerned with deep structures of inequality embedded in society, feminist theory emanating from Foucauldian premises offers an intense analysis of the relation between sexual violence and power.

Focusing on the mode of resistance in Foucauldian theory, Foucault claims that resistance is indispensable to the exercise of power as both are the result of multiple local points in networks. Despite global efforts to tackle it, sexual violence remains a global problem, and feminists need to invent unique methods of resistance. For example, radical feminism claims that in “order to tackle gendered oppression; women need to transcend patriarchal hegemony” (MacKinnon 34). But it is really hard to see how women could evade this dominant power to suspect the supremacy of patriarchal setup. Instead of attempting to overthrow entire societal setup, Foucault’s micro-level theory enables the shift in struggle by suggesting multiple local points of resistance. Resistance can still manifest itself within a state of domination where possibilities for resistance are reduced when people “consciously subvert the expectation of those in power” (Munro 80). Harriet Gordon, in his essay *A Foucauldian-Feminist Understanding of Patterns of Sexual Violence in Conflict* opines:

This theory of resistance generates greater possibilities for challenging sexual violence that may be more productive than attempting to abolish well-established institutions and states. Moreover, it allows for an intersectional approach to challenging sexual violence. It is important to acknowledge that power structures differently affect minority women, women from low socio-economic backgrounds, and so on. If there is no central location of power, nor of resistance, then multiple different forms of resistance can develop, including resistance specific to challenges faced by different groups of women. (29)

This resistance that challenges sexual violence and consciously subverts the expectations of those in power finds a representation in the movies like *Mom*, where centres of power viz. Police, Judiciary and the influential rich culprits find an excuse to inflict the sexual trauma to the victim. In *Mom*, Arya’s character assassination by the defence lawyer is done through these words “Don't you think your friend Arya left

with her boyfriend? They had sex. They had an argument; he beat her up. - Objection! Character assassination. -But unfortunately, in our society, we cannot openly admit to affairs" (*Mom* 00:56:10). In such instances, it is believed that the victim cannot anticipate legal emancipation hence developing a form of resistance that; though does not challenge the society as the whole working on a macro level, yet intends to subvert the hegemonic assertion through unlawful means, at times. Arya and Devki, having failed to get justice on the societal level, decide to involve themselves in such unconventional modes of resistance and revenge.

Arguing about the notion of Depthlessness in postmodern society with respect to this chapter, the point about Depthlessness put forward by Patricia Bizzell is very apt:

Postmodern people thus seem to be floating collections of fragments, whose everyday life is organized by consumerism, or the instant gratification of an increasing array of desires. I would add that consumerism can be seen as fitting into the "depthless" culture of the simulacrum in that consumerism offers substitutes for the real thing (soft drink ads notwithstanding), substitutes that do not satisfy desire but rather create an unending itch for more: such as, drugs as a substitute for food, casual multiple sex as a substitute for love, and so on. Jameson has suggested that "the yuppies" are representative postmodern people: their Cultural practices and values, their local ideologies, have articulated a useful dominant ideological and Cultural paradigm for this stage of capital. (478)

Bizzell argues that depthlessness in modern society has given way to certain anomalies unique to the postmodern society (425). While analysing the film, it is pertinent to take up the issue of the role of culture and society in inducing the sexual assault and justifying it, resulting in overall general Depthlessness. Much of what an individual in her/his life is, shaped by the culture he/she is born and lives through, acquiring behaviours, attitudes, and cultural values. Culture plays an important role in how certain societies and cultures view, perceive and process sexual assault. Perpetrators of the sexual assault might have certain characteristics shaped due to the society they inhabit; like childhood abuse, prior sexual behaviour, gender-related

attitudes, and cognition and substance abuse, etc. (Greathouse et al.). In the film, too, the perpetrators are shown drinking before the act. Their conversation also displays their perception about Arya; where they do not treat her more than an object that they intend to possess. Once their wish is declined, they do not hesitate in abducting and abusing her forcibly.

It is through observation and interpersonal violence that the cultural aspects of sexual violence can be figured out. Society and culture that encourage the objectification of women are more likely to have higher rates of sexual violence, thus making them appear inferior to men (Ward 56). At times the perpetrators take it to be socially sanctioned act, for which they are hardly reprimanded. They do not have any fear of law or agency, which usually is taken for granted in such cases. Such sanctity is usually approved by the society they live in.

*Mom* also brings focus to the infallibility of women as a mother. *Mom* and other several revenge themed films display a woman who is out to take revenge, usually for her daughter. A vast reservoir of adages and proverbs put mothers as infallible, extraordinary people. Such adages and proverbs glorify the mother and put them in the category of godliness, hence preventing them from acting like normal humans who are prone to several mistakes and shortcomings. Before viewing her as an individual and human being, she is first viewed to be a caretaker and a nurturer.

The debate about the 'justice' imparted to the culprits at the hands of Devki has been interpreted in myriad ways. It is advocated that due to the lack of hope of justice from the judiciary and society, Devki is justified in issuing them death verdicts. Due to the fact that very few cases of sexual assault are reported to the authorities and as many as 70%-80% rapes go unreported (Watts 67), thereby it becomes very difficult to gather the astounding psychological impact it might have on the victims. In such circumstances, victims, at times, are bound to take law in their hands. Ward also states:

In addition to violence, the incident of sexual violence involves elements of control, power, domination, and humiliation. In order to gain power and control over their victims, perpetrators of sexual violence resort to practices such as abduction, isolation, manipulation, coercion, threats, and sexual abuse. Offenders may not necessarily find

the act sexually gratifying, but it is the meaning attributed to power for men that may override sexual goals in such acts. (45)

Male entitlement is an obvious issue not only in the movie but also in all such instances where coercion is used to establish physical relations. Arya's rejection of Mohit's advancement and her lack of interest in him is a huge blow to his ego that he is not able to internalise. This results in Mohit and other accomplices ganging up to avenge blow to Mohit's ego. This is a cruel and frightening example of male bonding and toxic masculinity.

*Mom*, at times, succumbs to the traditional ideology too. When Devki goes to get a report filed about her missing daughter, a policewoman says, "You shouldn't be worried. It's Valentine's Day. She must be out with her boyfriend. There's no way she will tell you" ("*Mom*" 00:41:34). Such likelihood is vehemently declined by Devki stating "Sir, please. You might have dealt with similar cases before. But my daughter isn't like any of them" ("*Mom*" 00:41:55). By 'any of them', she means girls who stay out till late at night, or who wear dresses of their choice and 'has fun on Valentine's Day', stereotyping the notion of burden of chastity and morality on the shoulder of women only, as if all such girls are morally corrupt while the girls staying at home and abiding by their parents diktats are all morality personified.

Commercial Hindi cinema has transformed hugely from helpless female rape victim weeping profusely at the turn of events or commits suicide to the other extreme where she transforms into a raging goddess. The notion of the raging goddess is part of our historical belief where a woman is either termed to be a goddess; a sort of deification that declines women the authority to be normal humans with flaws, imperfections, and selfishness; like men. While men; slaves to their instincts and desires, are usually absolved of the greatest of the crimes, usually owing to their raging hormones. Hence, vengeance is the easiest route to applause. Witnessing a woman sabotaging the lives of culprits is usually a deeply gratifying spectacle for those who are disappointed with the 'system', but hardly ever, while viewing such films, the spectators introspect about their role in the scheme of things and sanctions that culture grants to rape.

*Mom* has been criticised at several fronts, including the allegation of stereotyping and predictability of a rape-revenge drama; without suggesting any

concrete solution (Chatterjee 120; Bhatia). However, until the cultural and social milieu undergoes a positive transformation, where the victims can anticipate a lawful resolve to their victimisation, till then films like *Mom* surely, and justifiability would continue to portray the revengeful and empowered women. These women are not keen on taking the law unto themselves at their own will but are forced to do so after having been denied justice. Devki is a New Woman, not only because she is educated but because she traverses her path with supreme grit and unshakeable resolve.

## Conclusion

The framework of the discussion in this thesis has provided an analysis of the relationship between postmodern Hindi cinema and the representation/ emergence of New Woman; with cinema being the most influential medium of communication to the vast majority of the Indian populace. The thesis has attempted to examine the changing gender representation of women in Hindi cinema and how larger ideological forces and market forces have impacted the process of this transformation. The film samples include the films which have fetched National Award for the Best Actress for the female leads of the films. Films across the span of approximately twenty-five years have been shortlisted for the analysis. The time frame of the films falls into a consistent gap of around five years. Samples include *Rudaali* released in 1993, followed by *Maachis* (1996), *Chandni Bar* (2001), *Fashion* (2008), *Queen* (2013), and *Mom* (2017). The prominent postmodern critics whose notions of postmodernity have been referred to for the analysis include, Fredric Jameson's Emotional Schizophrenia, Pastiche, and New Depthlessness, Michel Foucault's notions of Power and Sexuality, and Judith Butler's idea of Gender Performativity. In this study, the main focus has been on debating how the postmodern condition has created an environment where women in general and women in Hindi cinema, in particular, have secured a favourable condition to establish their gender identities and broken the manacles of conservative and restrictive environment. Such conservative and regressive ideologies have constrained the progress of women since time immemorial, but with the changing socio-cultural dynamics in the postmodern condition, they have been able to register their resistance and defiance.

The research began with analysing how the Hindi film industry has the ability to shape and alter the gender perceptions and related ideologies. It discussed the role Hindi cinema plays in the lives of viewers of the Hindi films, followed by the discussion on a variety of film theories and the features of postmodernism and the postmodern cinema. Subsequent chapters analysed the shortlisted films in the light of postmodern postulates of the above-mentioned critics. The focus of the research has been that cinema has come of age by attempting to reflect the struggles and toils of



the postmodern Indian New Woman and not only projecting them to be eye-candies and an object of gaze anymore.

The notion of the New Woman and her emergence in Hindi films interpreted from the angle of specific postmodernistic postulates forms one of the objectives of undertaking the research. In each chapter, the emergence of New Woman through the female lead characters of the films has been portrayed in the research. The key characteristics of the idea of New Woman viz. being Resistant, Autonomous, Resolute, Prudent, and Audacious, have been incorporated in the analysis of the films. These features are by and large are present in all the female leads of the select films. New Woman can be termed to be a phenomenon emerging out of the wider spectrum of feminism. It is a phenomenon that germinated in the West and subsequently spread across the globe. Having undergone multiple stages of alterations, the concept of New Woman has achieved a status of dignity and credibility. The central point of the notion is women and their status in society. As the women's lives started undergoing considerable change towards the end of the nineteenth century, a need by the feminist activists was felt to register the voice against the injustice being meted out to the women of the generation, particularly middle and high-class women. Along with the acquisition of higher education, women also secured formidable place in the conventional male domains of business professional occupations. These New Women represented to society and to the self a kind of personal autonomy and self-assuredness by not only indulging in household chores but also shouldering the duties across the four walls of her house. New Woman has a better understanding of human nature as she is more exposed and experienced than her predecessors.

In the current research, this analysis of the emergence of New Woman has been done in the light of postmodernistic postulates of Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. The research has extensively argued about the various aspects of interconnection between postmodernism and films, including postmodernistic characteristics of films, Hollywood films (common point of reference for postmodernistic cinema) and postmodernism, postmodernism in Hindi films, and the analysis and application of above mentioned critical approaches to the analysis of the emergence of New Woman in the Hindi films.

The research also focused on the analysis of trends in the portrayal of women characters in postmodern Indian cinema. Hindi cinema has been affected by postmodernism in several ways. Despite the increase in alternate sources of amusement, music, and the rising price of tickets; Hindi cinema has become the biggest source of entertainment and revenue generation. Popular Hindi films provide escapism by satisfying the viewers' fantastical desires; however, in postmodern times; new interpretations are attached to the dream world portrayed by a current lot of films. Thus the theory of postmodernism is indispensable to this research, as it investigates the utilisation of new techniques in the cinema and treatment of women as the media has played an important role in shaping the identity of women. Postmodernist films portray women as more independent, confident, and aware of their rights and position in society. Earlier, the roles played by the women in Hindi films had been the male directors' notion of the roles women ought to be playing, perceived by the director's ideology, values, and attitude combined with the demand of the viewing public. Thus, this research through its study of women-centric films tried to analyse how women challenge the power system; try to overcome the oppression, stand for their rights, and how these films act as a voice about the violence against women.

Postmodernist theories have shifted the attention from objective to subjective. Even if it is vehemently denied, as stated earlier, the fact remains that Indian society has been patriarchal for a very long time, which has prevented women from creating a space for themselves where they can express their desires and feelings. It is only in the postmodern world that they have been able to express the yet unexpressed. It is not necessary that the women protagonists of the female-centric films have any in-depth knowledge of these theories before embarking upon this journey of self-awareness. But the presence of these theories in the socio-cultural space they inhabit has enabled them subconsciously to insist on their rights.

*Rudaali* has been investigated from the angle of the role of Foucault's notions of Power and Sexuality. Foucault has extensively and clearly debated about the production and dissemination of power and how it affects society and individuals. The thesis investigates how the protagonist Sanichari, a poor untouchable living in the hinterland of Rajasthan, subverts patriarchal powers and sexual advancements as well

as being the object of gaze. *Maachis* brings to the forefront the misfortune of Veeran, who despite being at no fault of hers, is made a victim to oppressing circumstances. In an attempt to seek justice, she takes up an unlawful route to avenge her tragedy. From a rustic and docile girl, she transforms into a roaring and fuming woman who sheds the conventional notions of gender performativity what Butler argues about in her theory. Mumtaz of *Chandni Bar* faces immense trauma when she is displaced from her native city. Bombay is too ruthless and mechanical for a novice like her and she struggles immensely to get a foothold in the city. Jameson's ideas of New Depthlessness, Emotional Schizophrenia, and Pastiche have been appropriated in order to assess Mumtaz's struggle and her subsequent emergence. In *Fashion*, theories of Emotional Schizophrenia and New Depthlessness have been executed to investigate the actions and reactions of the main leads Meghna and Shonali. *Queen* is a narrative about the journey of Rani; her fears, her heartaches, her rejections, and her subsequent resistance against the powers which degrade and demean her self-worth. Butler's idea of gender performativity has been applied here to investigate how Rani transforms from being a powerless and defenceless coy woman to somebody who values her identity and self-worth. Similarly, Devki of *Mom* emerges as a specimen of New Woman through her self-assured and well chalked out actions when she pledges to take revenge against the perpetrators, the rapists of her daughter. Devki unable to find any assurance of justice at the hands of law and judiciary settles on her own course of action to bring justice to her daughter. Foucault's idea of Power acts as a key theory against which Devki's emergence is interpreted

Another objective of the thesis is to investigate the impact of socio-cultural forces on Hindi films. The research extensively highlighted the influence society and culture bears on the development and the possibility of the emergence of alternative ideologies and the mode of expression of Hindi films. Hindi films being the single most influential mode of entertainment in the media industry has the capability to alter and affect the perceptions of the audience. Subsequently, changed perceptions and ideology are invariably reflected in Hindi films. The growth has been mutual and all-inclusive. The films influence society by way of changes in representation, challenging existing norms, and transforming viewer's ideologies. Changing the

perspective of the society is the most crucial role films are said to be playing and films draw this ability from the society whose perspective it is empowered to change.

The social and cultural milieu of the films forms a strong foundation for the select films where the female leads find the ground for their emergence. They all belong to different times and social setups and do not share any commonality apart from the fact that they strive to fight for their due rights. Sanichari of *Rudaali* belongs to the rustic hinterland of Rajasthan, living in the abject poverty. She is a low caste woman, a victim of patriarchy and a biased social hierarchy. She is a victim of nexus between casteism, feudalism, and gender-based segregation. Society and the cultural framework are inextricably entwined with the narrative of the story, ultimately allowing Sanichari the opportunity to explore her selfhood towards the end of the film. Sanichari is also oppressed on the bodily level where she is supposed to be easy prey due to her vulnerability and powerlessness. The higher caste males of the society she lives in do not hesitate in making her an object of their gaze and passing lewd comments. Her reaction to this oppression is paradoxical as she is resisting the verbal and visual onslaught yet terms it to be her destiny to be objectified.

The social and cultural forces play a very instrumental role in the rest of the films as well. In *Maachis*, the cultural context has a strong presence and effect on the lives of the characters. Partition, attack on the Golden Temple, 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and resultant militancy affected the lives of Punjabis to a great degree. The theme of the film is drawn from the political and social conditions arising from these disturbances. Veeran is the victim of this turbulence as her personal life is sabotaged by the atrocities committed by the police, law, and the militancy. In *Chandni Bar*, these socio-cultural forces are very prominent and decisive. Mumtaz is compelled to abandon her native town in the wake of communal riots. She is forced to desert the peace, calm, and warmth of her house while exploring new lifeways in the bustling Mumbai metropolitan. It is an unseen and frightening world that she has to encounter ahead of her. She finds herself unable to fit in the milieu of dance bars of which a part she has been made forcefully.

In *Queen*, the socio-cultural forces act on the dual-level. In the Indian context, Rani is raised to be a meek, docile, and inert girl who lacks the resilience and fortitude to resist any injustice being meted out to her. The general social norms and conditions

for the 'ideal' girls deprive her of any agency to decide for her fate. Her fiancé taking advantage of her naiveté and not deeming her suitable to match his social position does not hesitate from deserting her. On the contrary, it is on the distant and far off land of Paris that she locates her identity and self-worth. Social milieu plays a very instrumental role in this context as well, as relatively liberal cultural beliefs and gender equality of a European country impart Rani a level playing field, giving her an opportunity to grow as a matured and more self-assured woman.

The socio-cultural forces in the form of the exploitative fashion world are dominant in the narration of the film *Fashion* as well. Both Meghna and Shonali are the prey to the cut-throat fashion industry that is notorious for risking the physical and mental well being of its players. They struggle and succeed, yet pay a hefty price for their success. Physical exploitation and the highly competitive environment of the fashion industry are a major cause of concern across the globe and of the film as well. Meghna and Shonali meet different fates as Meghna is able to find emotional support and comfort in her familiar milieu after having gone back to her native town; Shonali is deprived of any such solace and succumbs to the intense pressure to retain her sanity.

The presentation of Devki from *Mom* also reinforces the indispensability socio-cultural forces have in the formation of a film character, hence a film on a larger scale. Existing law and judiciary fail to impart justice to Devki and her daughter Arya, prompting Devki to take law in her hands. Devki's fight is with the conservative society that blames the rape victim for the atrocity inflicted upon her and does not question the perpetrators. This mindset is reflective of wider patriarchal dominance that suspects the morality and integrity of the victim and lets the culprits go unpunished.

Another objective that research aimed at was to find out the trends in the portrayal of women characters in postmodern Indian cinema. The research has, primarily in the first chapter, discussed in detail how women's representation has undergone a phenomenal change since the inception of the first Hindi film. A quick glance at the history of films establishes the fact that for the major part of the century since the first film released; women have been depicted carrying the conservative mould of the femininity. Representation of women has always been a selling point for

the films. Traditionally, the audience has relished watching women in various song and dance sequences, displaying their bodily perfection, and alluring primarily the male audience. Another version of this has been about those women who are portrayed in the role of the Mother, a chaste and pious woman, who is physically and morally incorrupt. The woman who was generally simple and homely has now been replaced by the modernised version of the woman who is comfortable with her sense of worth, sexuality, and the idea of resistance for attaining or maintaining her identity. The research also investigated that with the initiation of postmodern tendencies in the Indian society, and subsequently, Hindi cinema leads the viewers to believe that Hindi films have progressed over time in terms of the depiction of the women. Postmodernity and the invasion of the Western culture have had an immense influence on the content and location of films as well as how women are treated in line with that content. The research has extensively focused on the transformation this representation has undergone.

The thesis brings the idea to the forefront that unequal treatment of women has been a regular feature of Indian media, particularly the Hindi cinema. All along the preceding decades, women have been made to play hackneyed roles in all the capacities. The tendency has changed in recent years, where women have come up to be prominent figures such as choreographers, costume designers, directors, producers, editors, and screenwriters. Few women are lyricists and music composers too. With the women's movement gaining strength and highlighting the oppression of women and a struggle for an equal society, a number of women filmmakers attempted to bring women from the fringe to the centre of the gender debate. Highlighting Elaine Showalter's notion of gynocriticism, where the texts are interpreted from the female perspective, an alternate viewpoint and a female gaze brought the required focus on female subjectivity. Filmmakers like Aparna Sen, Sai Paranjape, Kalpana Lajmi, Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta, Reema Kagti, and Farah Khan have made films that had a very sensitive portrayal of women protagonists. These women were in search of social and gender identity; women who were firmly located in specific socio-historical contexts.

Women in Indian society have always been an inferior species, restricted to household chores; whereas men have always been the dominant force. Although women have been given a very respectable and enviable position in ancient Indian

texts, the reality has been contradictory. Even during the present times, women are restrained from playing crucial and decision-maker roles. Demographic trends reflect that women are also the sufferers of deep-rooted gender prejudice in the form of prenatal sex determination and female foeticide.

The present research further explored that all the films essentially centre around the notion of women attempting to break free from the constraint of binding patriarchal, social, legal, and political inhibitions restricting their exploration of the self. The experience of resistance, initial helplessness, and the subsequent emergence of their identities form the basic theme of the research. The protagonists of the films do not share any cultural or social common experience, yet they share the same oppression at the hands of various agencies, inducing them to raise a cry against the oppressive forces. Religion, demography, economic status, and personal belief system are extensively diversified in the experiences of these women, yet there are commonalities between their actions and reactions. The research, based on films taken for the analysis is qualitative, textual, and contextual; based on the plight of women who are based in different time frames and different socio-economic conditions.

Thus, to reach a conclusion, the present work attempted at investigating the emergence of New Woman as depicted in the popular Hindi cinema during the recent decades of postmodernism. More specifically, it is concerned to relate theories of postmodern feminism and the construction of female identity as represented in the select films. It primarily concerned to investigate what it might mean if debates on postmodernism are applied to the study of female characters in Hindi cinema. Questions like, whether this representation of women in Hindi films has undergone any change during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, owing to the changing paradigms of intellectual inquiries-political and social sciences, global and cultural studies, art practices and aesthetics have been attempted to be investigated.

The contribution of the present study is that it would abet the viewers in tracking the changes in the trends of the portrayal of women and the emergence of New Woman in Hindi films. The research would also help in investigating the impact of postmodern tendencies on the lives of women through the lens of cinema. It also elaborates upon the impact of certain specific socio-cultural and historical events/

phenomena on society through the lives of the protagonists. The research also paves the way for further research in the field by highlighting the already conducted research.



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