

Research Article

Revisiting Third Cinema: The 80s

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A B S T R A C T

Known as Parallel/ Art/ New wave Cinema, realist Indian cinema emerged parallel to the mainstream films as early as the 1930s. With the advent of sound, came singing and dancing dramas as religious epics, which grew popular with the masses, but a number of films catering to social problems and being naturalistic in their depiction also found fans despite being limited only to the classes of people who understood cinema.

The decade of art films believed in the auteur theory and opened a new avenue for Indian cinema, using new techniques and cinematic language. While male directors have always ruled the film industry be it commercial or parallel films, women directors had to work it hard to be able to create a space to express themselves. It was the decade of the eighties that saw directors like Sai Paranjpye, Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, and Mira Nair spread their wings and start off with art-house cinema. It took a long time since then, for women directors to be able to work and make a permanent and notable space for themselves in both parallel and commercial cinema. Thus, the likes of Paranjpye and Sen can be termed as the women pioneers of parallel cinema and be called synonyms of courage.

This paper aims to do a content analysis of four films which have been selected as each director's first film from the 80's decade. A study of these films will be done, grounded on few parameters like story, depiction of female characters, their dialogues, etc.

Written as a link between women directors and films, this study will explore the auteur-ship/author-ship of women directors in portraying or showing women characters on screen and the treatment of narratives/storytelling way of women directors.

Keywords: Women Directors, Parallel Cinema, Contemporary

Introduction

Men and women, considered to be two sides of the same coin, ironically have always been regarded and treated differently. Since ages, while the birth of a boy is celebrated with much pomp and joy, taking in account the fact that he is the one who would take the family forward, the birth of a girl child brings no change in the happiness quotient

of the family members because she will in the end be a 'paraya-dhan' or someone else's property. This level of discrimination and inequality is still, very much prevalent in many parts of India today. On one hand men, having an extra-marital affair is a way of proving their masculinity, for the women, it's kind of bringing their own as well as their family's reputation to ruin. While men have the

right to make everything and everyone wait until they are financially stable, women can't have that luxury and even if anyone dares to have that condition in life, no one would think twice before labeling her as "not a good girl". For, they become transgressed women who trespass rules and regulations set by the society, where transgression means an act that goes against a law, rule or code of conduct set by society and is basically seen as an offence. Considered as the minority gender, she doesn't have the right to decide or judge things for herself. Before marriage she is under the guidance of her parents and after marriage of her husband. This kind of bias is evident owing to the fact that since birth a child irrespective of its gender is brainwashed to adjust to the toxic masculinity and patriarchal society. They are taught to put specific work under specific gender. What people don't understand is that there is a something thing called "choice". It's an individual's choice to work or not to work, to be a homemaker or to work or be both, irrespective of gender. It shouldn't matter what anyone chooses to do. What should matter is that both the genders are given equal chances at life and even if they are judged, the parameters on which the judgment takes place should be equal for both.

People in India, be it men or women love assigning labels to gender and their roles. While men are the head of the family earning bread and butter, women are the boss of domestic chores. For leisure, while men watch or play sports, women attend kitty parties or watch TV serials. During any unforeseen circumstance, men can only empathize but the burden of sacrifice lies on the shoulders of women. The problem arises when someone tries to go against these pre-assigned labels or roles. They are rebuked by society, looked down upon and are said to be uncivilized and unworthy of residing in this country. These prejudices are omnipresent. One can find partiality and discrimination among the genders not only in the household sector but in all sectors of work and pleasure, Talking sectors i.e. the media in general and the Indian cinema industry in particular it can be stated that is a male-dominated industry, where every person ranging from a spot boy to a director or producer is a male, so much so that during the inception of this industry, it was men who played women characters on screen. But, much has changed since then. We have a fine number of women choreographers, costume designers, lyricists, editors, screenwriters and directors now but there is still a lot more to go. So, in an industry where the number of women directors is minimal with respect to its male counterparts, it can be assumed that the portrayal of characters, especially female, will differ in the way they are approached by female and male directors respectively. The roles played by women on-screen bear the notions, upbringing, ideologies, beliefs and approaches towards problems of the films' director personally. Since

cinema is a catalyst of social change and is also a medium to portray realities on 70 mm screen; the burden lies on its shoulder as having an important role in shaping the views on and about gender and its roles. The duty of cinema becomes more important because in a country like India, where the art of stalking/ molesting someone you admire is blindly followed by people as an inspiration taken from films, where women are objectified as food items, use and throw items; what a film shows and what a director wants to show holds a strong place.

Accordingly, this study aims to revisit the decade of the '80s of Indian cinema in which the films were based on social realities and problems but were also keen on gaining commercial success, called Third or Middle cinema. The paper shall study the representation of women by men and women directors on screen respectively in the context of ten Indian films. In short, this research aims to investigate the crossover of women, cinema and directors. Mainly, this paper shall attempt to answer the following: -

- How have the female characters been shown on screen? Do they show any form of transgression or not?
- What are the differences or similarities in the portrayal of women characters by men and women directors?
- What is meant by Third cinema or Middle Cinema?

Review of Literature

In a report by India brand equity foundation, it is mentioned that the 1970s & 1980s were the years when big-budget and multi-starrer movies dominated the screens. With the advent of women producers and directors in the industry parallel cinema did find some audiences too.

Srijita Sarkar in her thesis titled "An Analysis of Hindi Women-centric Films in India", observes that it was in the 1960s that parallel cinema carved a place for itself and started growing. This cinema style created for itself a separate domain that could not surpass but co-existed with commercial cinema. The directors associated with such films were considered highly intellectual and well-informed.

Aurobindo Ghose in one of his articles for The Frontier claims that there was a clear division among commercial/ first cinema and the cinema with any social message till the 1980's, but since the '80s, films with social messages combined with ingredients of commercial success, started being made, marking it the beginning of third cinema.

In an article for The Quint, Maanvi says middle-class cinema got a whole new space in which rather being shown as a mere object the female characters had their own say, their own opinion and voice. Actors like Shabana Azmi, Deepti Naval, Smita Patil took the center stage.

Mentioning Kandiyoti in her paper, "Women and their Portrayal in Indian Cinema", Mana Tabatabai Rad writes

that filmmakers such as Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, Deepa Nair and Aruna Raje have been courageous enough to show images of protagonist women highlighting their social and sexual identity.

Asma Ayob observes that the 1980's began to witness a shift in the psyche of women characters, who displayed a need to break free from the shackles of society having pre-existing notions about everything, thereby rising above what is traditionally expected of Indian women. Female characters were depicted as thinking more for themselves and also making independent choices.

Methodology

One of the major aims of this research is to address movies of a decade when art films and commercialization amalgamated to give rise to a new form of cinema known as third or middle cinema, in which the representation of female characters on screen has been studied. Thus, for the same, I used *Content Analysis*. This method is relevant in this study because it enables researchers to develop a detailed and critical insight into the belief systems that are generated through cinema. This method also provides this paper with a critical lens to study the portrayal of women in Indian cinema and the unconventional roles portrayed by women in these films. Moreover, it critiques the cinematic representation of issues like gender and its roles. The movies chosen for this study not only try to bring forth the problems that women face in society but will also tell whether they were transgressed or not. The films have been selected randomly from the decade of the '80s starting from 1980 to 1989. They have been listed down below in Table 1. The study is based on *Secondary Sources*: Research Papers, Books, Journals, Reports and Articles from Web sites.

were chosen as a sample size for a number of reasons that are discussed below: -

- The selected films showcase women characters solving their problems rather being helped by the men, making themselves their own 'hero'.
- These films do not only depict women who belong to economically sound families but are also from varied social and economic classes.
- The women characters have been shown to have desires and opinions of their own and that they can even fight for them.
- Since the paper deals with Indian Cinema, 8 Hindi films and 2 Bengali films were analyzed. The women-centric movies that are made in other regional languages could not be analyzed due to the researcher's inability to comprehend other regional languages.

Analysis and Findings of Films

Plot Synopsis of the Films

Sparsh (Touch), 1980 - Directed by Sai Paranjpye, it is the story of Anirudh (Naseeruddin Shah), a blind man and Kavita (Shabana Azmi), a widow. Anirudh is the principal of a blind school and Kavita is still dealing emotionally with the sudden demise of her husband. Both of them accidentally meet at a common friend's party where Kavita is persuaded by them to join the blind school as a volunteer. Now, as the story unfolds, both of them develop a fondness for each other and later on get engaged. But, Anirudh is shown to be a self-respecting man who hates the idea of seeing anyone trying to help him or rather pity him for being blind and when the same is done by Kavita, he rebukes her. He asks her to not be Gandhari to him and sacrifice her life for him. Soon individual complexes tag along and both of them struggle to get past it to find the "touch" of love.

Table 1. Movies selected for this study

S. No.	Release Year	Title of The Film	Director of The Film	Issues on Which Films Aare Based
1.	1980	Sparsh	Sai paranjpye	Widow remarriage
2.	1981	Chakra	Rabindra dharamraj	Severe victimization of women and poverty
3.	1982	Bazaar	S Sarhadi	Prostitution
4.	1983	Mandi	Shyam benegal	Physical abuse, flesh trade and prostitution
5.	1984	Parama	Aparna sen	Female desire and extra-marital affair
6.	1985	Akhir Kyon?	J. Om. Prakash	Trust Issues and affairs
7.	1986	Ek Pal	Kalpana lajmi	Female desire and extra-marital affair
8.	1987	Mirch Masala	Ketan mehta	Severe physical violence against women
9.	1988	Waris	Ravindra peepat	Family feuds and sacrifice
10.	1989	Sati	Aparna sen	The age-old tradition of Sati, Female desire

The sample size that I have chosen belongs to third or middle cinema that has been introduced and discussed in the literature review. In addition to this, these movies

Chakra (Vicious Circle), 1981 - Directed by Rabindra Dharmaraj, this is a story of Amma (Smita Patil), who along with her husband and child has to flee away from their

village, when the husband killed the rapist of Amma. In the new city, life for Amma becomes more morbid when her husband gets killed by some smugglers. From here on, the story revolves around how Amma single-handedly raises her child and tries to instill in him good morals despite the immoralities of life around them. Indirectly, she receives help from a man but still there seems to be not much hope for her and her son.

Bazaar (Market), 1982 - Directed by Sagar Sarhadi, the story goes as Najma (Smita Patil) had been sold off to Nawabs by her parents for money but she ran away from there to Bombay, with Akhtar (Bharat Kapoor) who had promised to marry her. Days passed but they didn't marry as Akhtar wanted to earn money and set up a business first with the help of his con friend Sahir Khan (B.L. Chopra). Salim (Naseeruddin Shah), a renowned poet is madly in love with Najma and hasn't married himself as he has been waiting for her. On the other hand, Sahir Khan a friend of Akhtar asks them to find a good bride for him. Najma takes on the responsibility and unintentionally gets her brother Sarju's (Farooq Shaikh) love interest Shabnam (Supriya Pathak) married off to him. Later on, when she gets to know of this, she holds herself responsible for the chaos that has been created in her brother's life and Shabnam's death (suicide). She feels guilty of having committed a heinous crime and boards a train rejecting and leaving Akhtar and his friend behind.

Mandi (Market Place), 1983 - Directed by Shyam Benegal, a satirical comedy on politics and prostitution, the film unfolds the story of a brothel, located in a prime location which the politicians are eyeing. The story goes as Rukmini Bai (Shabana Azmi) is the head of a brothel, where the women live in harmony. She is close to everyone but more specifically to Zeenat (Smita Patil) and Basanti (Neena Gupta), both are classical singers and dancers, respectively. Their life turns around when Zeenat falls in love with Mr. Aggarwal's (Saeed Jaffery) son, Sushil. After coming to know of this, Rukmini Bai reveals a harsh truth to Zeenat that she is an illegitimate child of Aggarwal and a prostitute, which makes her a sibling to Sushil. A state of panic emerges in the brothel when Zeenat elopes with Sushil but on remembering her biological status, she runs away from him as well. Becoming aware of this, Rukmini Bai keeps sobbing and instead of gathering sympathy, she is rebuked by a prostitute Nadira (Soni Razdan) and is told to exit the brothel as they didn't need her anymore. She leaves the brothel with her faithful helper Tungrus (Naseeruddin Shah).

Parama (The Ultimate Woman), 1984 - Directed by Aparna Sen, the movie is on a 40-year old woman, Paroma, whose life revolves around being called bou-maa (daughter in law), kaki-maa (aunt) and boudi (brothers' wife). Her normally paced life suddenly turns around when she is approached

by a photo-journalist to pose for a photo essay and through the process she discovers herself. Everything was fine until one day when some of the photographs, which were semi-nude, are published by the photographer without her consent. At knowing this, she is rejected by her husband and as a result suffers a mental breakdown. Later on, she is prescribed psychiatric treatment and is accepted by her family but she refuses them, has no guilt and sets on a journey to find a job.

Aakhir Kyon? (At Last, Why), 1985 - Directed by J. Om. Prakash, Nisha, (Smita Patil) an orphan was adopted by her relatives, who had a daughter Indu (Tina Munim). Later on in life, Indu falls for Kabir (Rakesh Roshan) but he in return falls for Nisha, as she would be an obedient and easily moldable wife in contrast to Indu, who was quite liberal and progressive in her views. A few years into the marriage, Nisha is treated like a maid as she has no independent existence and Kabir's love affairs are hidden from her on the pretext of business trips. She faces some complications in her pregnancy which leads to Indu coming to their home to take care of her but in turn gets closer to Kabir, reviving her attraction for him. Upon coming to know of this, Nisha refuses to adjust to this as asked by Kabir and hands over their daughter to the housemaid. In the male-dominated world, Nisha struggles and meets Alok (Rajesh Khanna) who helps her in building a career in writing. Nisha helps Kabir, who is struggling with financial problems in getting their daughter married. Nisha is asked by Alok to make their relation legal which he resists and he asks, "Aakhir Kyon"? She still worried about the society which did not help her when she was struggling and in the end applies Sindoor on her hair parting declaring her wedded status.

Ek Pal (One Moment), 1986 - Directed by Kalpana Lajmi, this film is about female-desire and extra-marital affairs, set in the tea gardens of Assam. Priyam (Shabana Azmi), is married to Ved (Naseeruddin Shah). While her husband is away, she has an extra-marital affair with her former boyfriend Jeet (Farooq Shaikh). On becoming pregnant she decides to give birth to the child even after protests from Jeet because of having undergone a miscarriage previously. After returning to his wife Ved eventually accepts both the wife as well as the child.

Mirch Masala (Hot Spice), 1987 - Directed by Ketan Mehta. A tax collector, Subedar (Naseeruddin Shah) at seeing Sonbai (Smita Patil), lusts over her and asks her to sleep with him in the absence of her husband. But she resists him and takes shelter in the enclosed compound of a spice factory. The factory's Chowkidar Abu Mian (Om Puri) closes the factory door on the face of Subedar. As a result, Subedar asks the Mukhiya (Suresh Oberoi) to get Sonbai to him else he will destroy the town. The terrified Mukhiya and the

rest of the town decide to bring Sonbai to the Subedar on one condition that they will not molest any more women. The Subedar refuses to agree to any of the conditions. On the other hand, the women inside the factory are initially furious over Sonbai for bringing this ill fate to them but as violence goes on they develop compassion for Sonbai and Abu Mian. Abu Mian did not submit to the commands of Subedar, who ordered his men to enter the factory and capture Sonbai. Guarding the gate of the factory Abu Mia breathed his last. As the Subedar tries to grab Sonbai, the women inside the factory mounted a sudden defense by attacking him with chili powder, which resulted in him becoming blinded and crying in pain.

Waris (Heir), 1988 - Directed by Ravindra Peepat. A wealthy, widowed Kishan Singh (Pradeep Kumar), has made a will distributing the house equally between his sons, Dulla (Amrish Puri) and Gajjan (Kulbhushan Kharbanda). Apart from this, he has willed his farmland only to Gajjan's son, being displeased with Dulla. Gajjan's only son, Shravan (Raj Kiran) meets and falls in love with Paramjeet alias Paro (Smita Patil). Barely had the young couple completed the marriage rituals when Shravan was killed, leaving Paro a widow and a completely devastated Gajjan. Dulla now wants one of his sons to marry Paro so that she can give birth to the new heir but she refuses and teaches Dulla a lesson by getting her father-in-law re-married to her younger sister Shibo (Amrita Singh). With a heavy heart Shibo on the other hand leaves her love Bhinder (Raj Babbar) for her sister. Paro insists on them having a child so that they can have an heir but the father-in-law gets killed and Shibo again finds solace in Bhinder.

Sati (Widow Burnt Alive), 1989 - Directed by Aparna Sen. Uma, a mute orphan girl, in a village of 1828, has a disastrous horoscope which states that she will become a widow at an early age which means she has to undergo the ritual of being burnt alive on her husband's funeral pyre. To avenge this, her family gets her married to a banyan tree. Moreover, the fact that she cannot speak, adds up to her misery.

Analysis of Female Protagonists

SHE has been incarnated many times, in numerous ways. While for some, she has been the ideal mother/ wife/ daughter, simultaneously for others, she is the one who defies the rules of society, goes against what according to set rules is natural or normal and makes her voice/ opinion heard. While, some are assigned traditional roles and shoulder the responsibility of caring for and looking after the family by remaining confined to the private sphere of home, others have been shown standing against wrong and breaking society's shackles. In this segment, I have analyzed the main woman protagonists of the films under study.

Kavita - Sparsh

A young widow, Kavita is struggling with her emotional vacuum and needs when she comes across Aniruddh, the principal of a school for the blind who himself is blind. Kavita is shown to be reluctant at first but as time passes she becomes at ease with Anirudh. Keeping her present situation in mind, she is very much in need of involvement and soon the pleasure and life-lines coming from the children win her over. Her personality blooms and quite naturally she becomes closer to the man responsible for this, Anirudh and ends up getting engaged to him. She is shown to have a very natural and warm nature. In a scene, Kavita shops for a new sari, just like a blind person would, closing her eyes and using her fingertips to choose one that Anirudh will like. Everything seems to be going perfectly at first, but then little disturbances occur. Self-doubt creeps into the relationship as Aniruddh fears dependence on Kavita, who on the other hand does everything to be part of Aniruddh's universe. He asks her to not behave like Gandhari and be too devoted to him just like, in the Mahābhārata, Gandhari voluntarily blind-folded herself throughout her married life since her husband Dhritarashtra was blind. The movie questions and challenges the age-old traditions of women torture and abuse through Kavita. First, since she was a widow, she didn't have to go through the process of being burnt alive in the same funeral pyre as that of her husband and be known as Sati. She had the freedom to choose her partner and re-marry. Secondly, because she is married, it wasn't required of her to be too sacrificing for her husband, just like Gandhari did. She does not have to be blind her whole life just because her husband is. There was no need of devotional sacrifice towards her second husband. Kavita's sacrificial attitude has been justified in the film by her emotional past and her new present.

Amma - Chakra

Amma is an earthy, sensuous woman who in all the filth and misery finds some happiness while maintaining her sense of self. She is a slum-dweller whose entire life revolves around her desire for a home and life of the security. She struggles to bring up her teenage son by keeping him on the right side of the law while the son wants to emulate the local dada who is also a friend of theirs. Amma also has a truck-driver lover from whom she yearns to have a son. Another dream of hers is to have a more permanent dwelling made of corrugated sheets. She gets pregnant again and has a better house but her happiness is short-lived when her son and the local dada are arrested and the basti is demolished. Amma's lovemaking scene and a much-publicized open-bathing scene with a generous view of her thighs did raise many eyebrows. From the struggles of a mother to that of a wife eagerly awaiting her husband's arrival, Amma shows undying grit and courage of a woman, a mother and a wife.

Her journey from breaking social barriers to claiming her right to her body, to display or flaunt it if she so desires is what challenges the prevalent patriarchy.

Najma & Shabnam - Bazaar

This is a film that highlights women's treatment as property and not individuals in feudal Indian society. Having been wronged by her relatives Najma rebels and leaves home but she finds herself the victim of greater interests than those she fled. She left prison only to fall into another where her movements are observed and calculated. She is obliged to submit to the lust of men that she had tried to escape from. And what is both sad and beautiful at the same time is that the man she loves (Akhtar) is also trapped. He's her caretaker, her savior but also her master and manipulator. Her character is struggling to find meaning within the two jaws of a vice that crushes her: her own family's dependence on the ageless practice of using female flesh at the best possible price and the necessity of securing a husband who will give her a form of social recognition without which she is doomed. The compromises she accepts to make to reach her goal and the agonized moments which she goes through in order to fulfill her needs portrays a realistic picture of women's plight. Another female protagonist, Shabnam asks her lover to hide her from the eyes of the cruel world after marriage as she just wants to be his sweetheart, loved and cared by him. But little does she know that despite all her efforts every lustful eye will single her out to satisfy their heinous carnal pleasures. Though these two women protagonists go through a lot of suffering due to a lack of support from their families and their communities, yet they gather strength and bravely raise their voices against these evil customs in their own different ways. While Najma chose to leave her master/ lover behind, Shabnam succumbs to suicide instead of marrying a person she doesn't know. The movie also conveys the message of how economic independence in women can lead to their independence from being oppressed by society. Furthermore, it ridicules the patriarchal society we live in and the way women are treated as cheap 'commodities'.

Rukmini Bai & Zeenat - Mandi

The women decide to push back the patriarchal pressure and the chauvinistic attitudes but their lives become a serious challenge. Rukmini Bai, the head of the brothel treats the girls like her own children- she is stern, yet protective, loving but sneers and snaps at them for lazing around, much like any other mother-figure. The relationship that she shares with the other sex workers is not hierarchical or exploitative. The girls living there are her own and she treats them like family. Thus, neither of the girls are forced to work or kept under continuous surveillance or ill-treated and abused. The girls are close friends with each other and spend a lot of their time gossiping about

the happenings in the house and the neighborhood. They treat sex work like any other form of labor and thus do not see themselves as oppressed or marginalized. Among the girls, Rukmini Bai seems to nurse a soft spot for Zeenat, who sings spectacularly. She is kept away from sex work and focuses more on her musical abilities. Her room is on the first floor, away from the chaos, where she silently strums at her sitar and practices her music. The men who frequent the brothel are enamored by her voice and beauty but have been strictly instructed by Rukmini Bai to stay away from her. She unknowingly falls in love with her sibling. But on knowing about her relationship with him, she continues to love him shows her gut. She defies everything for him and breaks the shackles of the brothel and runs away for him. For Rukmini Bai, life is harsh but she chooses to endure it rather than escape it. The film acknowledges their agency, dignity and status as workers and holds them to the same moral standards as any other person in the film.

Paroma - Paroma

The director deals with the state of a married woman when confronted with an act of sexual liberation. The film begins with Durga Puja celebration where the Goddess, regarded as a symbolic representation of women, one that submits to the traditionally accepted views of the role and value of women is like Paroma. A very coy and submissive housewife who always seeks the permission of her mother-in-law before performing her household activities, Paroma is a dedicated wife to her husband besides ensuring the smooth functioning of the household activities. She is quite contented with her marital life and appears to be happily performing the multiple roles of a wife, mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, which elevates her as a 'respectable' woman in the eyes of the society until a photographer who acts as a catalyst in her life by beginning an illicit affair with her takes her on a journey of exploring her sexuality. But, in this relation too she is submissive and is under the control of his masculinity. He exploits every opportunity to dominate her and considers it right to capture every moment of her life. This brings forth the deep-seated fears of Paroma hidden behind the veil of a perfect Indian housewife.

Unfortunately, the bitter revelation of her semi-nude photographs and her affair with a man creates havoc in her family. She is rebuked and abused by her family and society and suffers an emotional breakdown. She even attempts suicide but fails and eventually loses her mental balance. The family forgives her out of pity. In the end, while in hospital, Paroma's hair has been cropped down for the purpose of brain surgery. The doctor thinks that she's in need of psychiatric treatment but is surprised to learn that she harbors no such feelings of guilt. The suicide attempt was to relieve her of her repressed emotions so that she

can break free from the claustrophobic role of an idle housewife who is confined to her household responsibilities. The film shows that there are women like Paroma who are financially dependent on their husbands and whose lives are defined by their familial roles of mother, wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law or aunt-in-law. If anything happens to jeopardize her primary relationship with her husband all her other relationships get jeopardized in turn.

Nisha & Indu - Akhir Kyon?

While Nisha is a woman and keeper of values, tradition and culture, Indu is liberated, having strong opinions and a girl with western values. As fate would have it, Kabir falls for Nisha but Indu falls for Kabir. Kabir selects Nisha as he found her to be of marriage material; that is the one who can be taken home, whereas Indu was opinionated and a self-sufficient kind of girl who could not be marriage material. A few years into the marriage, Kabir obviously gets tired of Nisha because she has no charm and is not financially dependent whereas Indu is. Kabir and Indu get married resulting in Nisha leaving his house and their daughter behind. A few years later, she makes a name for herself as a novelist and finds a sympathetic friend in Alok who helps her come out of the miserable situation. Nisha is shown to be rebuking patriarchy only after being affected by it. The film shows that there are two types of girls, one is a keeper of traditions, who is marriage material while the other is strong-headed and liberated, who is an extra-marital affair material. It shows that woman need to be financially independent to gain respect and love otherwise they don't have an identity of their own.

Priyam - Ek Pal

Priyam marries Ved, a wealthy, estate owner. She is shown to be living with her loneliness and depression as she spends days confined to her large home when her husband becomes increasingly preoccupied with work. The situation becomes worse by her inability to conceive following a miscarriage. This is not the life Priyam wanted - she was someone vivacious and thirsting for adventure. She is a woman who is capable of expressing her sexuality without any regret and remorse. When her husband leaves for a year, Priyam has a sexual fling with a boy who had courted her before marriage. She conceives but decides to keep the child, although scandal is inevitable. Her husband returns almost after a year and is happy to see her carrying a child and accepts both his wife and the baby. The film explores the permissiveness that supposedly flourishes in Assam's tea estates through a love triangle between an unhappy wife, her workaholic husband and a former boyfriend who irresponsibly impregnates her. Lajmi created a stirring portrait of a wealthy housewife whose zest for life has been stifled by the humdrum of an un-gratifying marriage.

Sonbai & Saraswati - Mirch Masala

Sonbai is a traditionally perfect wife who loved her husband and was emotionally dependent on him but as the events unfold, we come to see her as an unapologetic, spunky and outspoken character. When Subedar tries to apprehend her by gripping her arm, she retaliates by slapping him and walking away leaving him humiliated and enraged. Sonbai is able to escape and find refuge in a spice factory. She doesn't indulge in self-pity or think about sacrificing her self-respect or acting against her will for the sake of the community or village. She has no doubt, no dilemma. Acting with a mind of her own, she is sure about what she wants and does not want. Even when the men in the village and the women trapped along with her in the factory insist that she give up her resilience for the sake of others, she proposes leaving the factory and going "somewhere," but never does she budge from her opposition towards the Subedar's proposal. And she remains unfazed by the negative vibes from her own kind - the other women in the factory. Sonbai asserts her sexual autonomy and agency by refusing to succumb to a powerful male figure's demands.

In the end, two women charge towards the Subedar, holding a bagful of ground chili powder and throw it at him. Sonbai's counterpart is Saraswati (Mukhiya's wife). She is seen as the dutiful but distracted wife of Mukhiya, who rejects her bed. She takes a stand, locking him out of their house and saying she will let him enter only when he learns to treat it like a home. As a woman who is somewhat educated she dares to challenge the established order and takes her young daughter to school. This results in her husband storming into the school, taking the child and flinging it into his wife's arms. She is being threatened that if it ever repeats and he will break her legs. In another scene, when the fearless Saraswati tries to summon up a sisterhood of solidarity for Sonbai, her husband drags her by hair and after a few resounding slaps, locks her indoors setting an example for others whose wives had had the urge to join Saraswati in her mission. She is shown to be the only progressive-minded woman in the village who tries to gather together a weak army of thali-beating women but fails. Thus, this film is a searing critique of the patriarchal society and men who abuse power.

Paro & Shibo - Waris

Paro aka Paramjit has been shown to be strong-willed woman who gets widowed at an early stage in marriage when her father-in-law's brother (Dulla) gets her husband killed for their property. Her fierceness and adamant nature come out when she is forced by Dulla to marry one of his sons so that they can get an heir which shall make them indirectly the owner of the property. But, Paro is unshaken and refuses this offer. In return she gets her father-in-law married to her sister Shibo. Shibo, on the other hand loves

another man but sacrifices her love and life for her sister. This shows how Paro used her sister in order to take revenge against Dulla. Paro goes a step ahead by asking her sister and father-in-law to have a child so that they remain the heir to the property and can defeat Dulla. As fate would have it, Shibo gives birth to a child but on fighting with Dulla, Paro loses her life and Shibo goes back to her lover with the child. The film, on one hand, depicts the fight of Paro against her husband's killer but also show how Paro uses her own sister as a weapon against fighting the villain and how Shibo, happily agrees to sacrifice her life for her. This shows that whatever be the situation, the baggage of sacrifice has to fall on the shoulder of a woman.

Uma - Sati

Uma lost her mother at an early age and her maternal uncle, Gangacharan Chattopadhyay takes her responsibility. As time passes, Uma becomes a burden to this family even after sharing many household duties. Her position in the family may not have been a burden if she would not have been a female which also adds to her challenges of being both a woman and a person suffering from a speech impairment. As the camera moves to another scene where the domesticated cow gives birth to a calf, the entire family praises the Lord's grace because this calf will grow up to bring in lucrative profit for the family. This connects the fact that a "human" female is considered less desirable, often baneful for the family as she brings nothing with her. She grows up to be someone else's property or 'paraya-dhan'.

As for Uma, her horoscope indicates her early widowhood. The questions as to who will marry her and that it is very difficult to wed the younger daughter before the elder one haunts the Brahmin family. They are told by the village priest that Uma can be married off to a Banyan tree as it is a form of the Lord himself and hence shall live forever and this shall help the family on all sides. She screams with pain when her forehead is rubbed on the hard and rough bark of the banyan tree, the bridegroom. Although she doesn't understand the phenomenon of 'marriage', Uma develops a friendly bond with the tree where she hides her treasured

items, bangles and fruits in the hollows of the old tree trunk. Uma continues to live until she becomes an instrument to pacify the lust of the local schoolmaster Nabin who uses Uma for satisfying his lust. But after this Uma herself is shown to come back to Nabin from the urge of her own physical bodily needs. She becomes pregnant and to save the family prestige Uma's aunt goes to a witch doctor to take medicine for abortion of Uma's unwanted pregnancy. She was not allowed to stay with others and was sent to the cowshed for shelter. Alone, Uma faces another stormy night when the shed is broken. She knocks her aunt's door but it doesn't open and she goes back to her mute husband, takes refuge in the branches of the Banyan tree. The next morning he villagers, are surprised to find her dead lying beside the main branch (it is also broken and resembles the death of Uma's tree-husband) and surprisingly Uma's forehead is adorned with blood representing vermilion. The director uses vermilion to prove Uma's chastity since vermilion is considered to be the holy symbol of a Hindu married woman. Uma is finally detached from life and thereby she has to earn her freedom from the constant burden of herself and the horrible society and its 'virtuous' beliefs and rituals.

Post Analysis Understandings

The films depict the problems one has to face if they belong to the female gender other than a man. How, in every step of their lives whatever they choose to do, women are answerable to the endless questions of society. That it is always they who have to prove their sanctity, their sacrifice and love for family. Women are just commodities to be used, abused and thrown away as soon as they quench the temporary attraction of a man. Also, analyzing these films showed that if they go against what they are asked to do according to the society, they are easily labeled as transgressed, i.e. someone who goes against the set norms and creates offense. But the question arises, who sets these norms and on what parameters? Why should someone be judged on the basis of them? They aren't transgressed women but women having opinions, choices, desires and the fire to do something.

Table 1. Movies selected for this study

S. No.	Category	Male Directors	Female Directors
1.	Approach	Strong Male Characters Are Needed To Enhance The Female Characters.	Female Characters Individually Are Strong Enough.
2.	The Portrayal of Incidents Against Women	The Incidents Against Women Try To Evoke A Sense Of Pity For Them.	The Incidents Against Women Try To Show Their Anger For The Injustice They Face.
3.	Characterization of Female Roles	Shown To Be Docile And They Revolt And Resist Only When Pushed To Extreme Limits, Otherwise They Wait For The Things To Settle On Their Own.	Shown To Be Self- Opinionated And Brave Who Care For Others But Also Fulfill Their Own Needs To Live And Love.

What was also found was the difference in the narratives and the manner in which the female characters have been approached by male and female directors respectively. Four out of ten of the films in the account have female directors while the rest are directed by male directors. As the Review of Literature suggests, there are very few female directors or technicians as compared to males in Indian film industry but Sai Paranjpye, Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, Nandita Das to name a few are the most well-known among the few female film-makers in India. They are known for making films addressing bold social issues, which talk of and about women and gender equality. Women directors were more sensitive but brave in their portrayal of women characters and issues. In fact, women directors had a detailed analysis of certain challenging issues, like fighting loneliness, having extra-marital affairs and finding ways to live life their way.

How bravely these women directors portrayed their characters without making them a subject of sympathy to the viewers was in stark contrast to their male counterparts. There was a stronger desire to voice their sexual needs amongst the characters of the woman directors, as opposed to the films of their male counterparts. Further, it was noticed that a greater tenacity amongst the woman characters from the films of woman directors emerged as winners even in the most challenging situations. Male directors, on the other hand showed women coming out and fighting only after being wronged or have been abused or cheated on to bring out the fierceness in them. They required some sort of push from men to be able to do what they wanted.

Conclusion

Through the use of content analysis, the researcher's main aim was to understand what makes the selected films different from the commercially successful ones. This study considered' films where women have dared to resist patriarchy and have not regretted their decision. Along with this it also sheds light on the way the gender of the director affects the portrayal of women characters on screen. Hindi cinema has included various aspects in their representation of women but still there is a long way to go until these women-centric films become a part of regular Bollywood cinema. In fact, in the past five years there has been an increase in the women-centric cinema and these films have tried to convey positive messages regarding the strength of women. Films of Zoya Akhtar, Nandita Das, Meghna Gulzar, Konkona Sen Sharma and the likes have raised the bar and have given hope that the future of Indian cinema is in correct hands.

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