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## The Question of Women: Changing Trends in the Cinematic Reflections of Women

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### Abstract:

The interest of this paper lies within the portrayal of women in Hindi cinema. The paper traces the Hindi films produced from 1930s to look at the changing trends of female portrayal from decade to decade striving to uncover the workings of patriarchal mindset and outlook in films. It further goes on to discuss some path breaking films that deviated from the norm in an attempt to identify and analyse areas where feminism comes into contact and, at times conflict, with our society's traditional values and also how the films have reflected the changing times along with opinions and ideologies of our society. This gives us a chance to probe deeper into the psyche of our society which is both shaped and reflected by the movies produced as a whole by a segment that itself is a part of our society.

### Key Words:

Hindi cinema, stereotypical characterization, mainstream Hindi films, cinematic portrayal, objectification of women.

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Cinema does today what literature did before cinema was born- entertains, educates, informs and influences. It is not just influenced by the society, it also influences society. Cinema has the power to both reinforce ideology and reform society. The Hindi film industry has come a long way and while it is true that women in Hindi cinema are treated and represented in the fixed moulds of stereotypes, either as sex symbols or as suffering martyrs, it is also true that there have been attempts to break those moulds and showcase the real woman encouraging and enabling her to fight the forces of patriarchal oppression.

Ours is a patriarchal society and commercial Hindi cinema reinforces the dominant societal narrative. It seems that representations of characters and situations are carefully controlled playing into the hands of societal dictats and always reinstating hegemonic ideologies. Be that as it may, a glance at the history of Hindi cinema unveils some leaks or rather lapses in the cinematic portrayal of women which resist or challenge the reigning patriarchal ideology that seeks to objectify women. As Viridi puts it "*Points of rupture, break, and destabilization can be traced within the dominant paradigm, and they sometimes—speaking optimistically—point to the possibility of change*"(126). Working within the parameters of mainstream Hindi film format, some creative and innovative directors have had the courage and conviction to give us some meaty and substantial characters. Although rare, such fault lines allow for the cinematic narrative to present to the audience an alternative to the patriarchal order.

The image and attitude of the women in Hindi cinema has changed from time to time to reflect the changing trends and time. Each decade had its own brand of women in films, most of them were stereotypes but some deviated from the fixed mould. Each decade presented fresh challenges for women, probing them to find their place in the changing times, in a business that was constantly changing and evolving.

Even though the movies of the 1930s raised social movies, there were some movies that focussed on the issues of women. What's surprising is that the movies that came out in 1930s, just two decades past the release of first Indian film, were more daring in terms of content and portrayal as compared to the post-independence decades. Cinema of that era also talked of issues like female

emancipation among other social issues. *Miss 1933* (1933), by Chandulal Shah dealt with the issue of woman's freedom of choice and female autonomy. Homi Master's *Samaj Ki Bhool* (1934), was about a widow's right to remarry as was Hemchandra's *Anath Ashram* (1937). V. Shantaram's *Amarjyoti* (1936) portrayed a woman who rebels against injustice by becoming a pirate queen while *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) portrayed a young girl refusing to consummate her forced marriage with a much older widower. R.S. Choudhury's *Hamari Betiyan* (1936) dealt with the issue of gender discrimination. Sohrab Modi's *Talaaq* (1938) dealt with the issue of women's right to divorce. Such films and female portrayal were few, as Hindi cinema in those days predominantly churned out films with conventional mythological and historical themes but overall the mood of the industry was less conservative as compared to the subsequent decades. The following decades denied any depth or dimension to the female characters in the films.

The decade also saw the Australian actress Mary Ann Evans, who later became popular as *Fearless Nadia*. She appeared or rather exploded on screen with stunt films brought out by the Wadia brothers in the mid-'30s. Her movie *Hunterwali* (1935) saw Nadia as the hunter-wielding masked woman who fought injustice in her own unique style. Even though a foreigner, she was India's original stunt queen with a career that spanned for over three decades. The bold characterization and the image that she portrayed, that of a masked woman with a whip, played on the submerged sexual fantasy of the predominantly male audience.

In the decades that followed after the Indian Independence, the depiction of females in cinema was in a way less emancipated and less bold but the heroines were still spirited. On one hand 1953 saw Sohrab Modi's *Jhansi Ki Rani*, which portrayed the female lead on a battlefield fearlessly fighting the British, and on the other hand Bimal Roy's *Parineeta*, portrayed a submissive female surrendering her freedom at the altar of tradition. Bimal Roy's adaptation of Saratchandra Chatterjee's novel *Devdas* came out in 1955, which portrayed two extraordinary women, both opinionated and strong willed, in love with the same man who was weak and shirked responsibility. *Sujata* (1959), raised voice against the social issue of untouchability with the love story about a Brahmin boy and an untouchable girl. Roy's *Bandini* (1963) on the other hand was about a woman in prison for murdering her lover's insane wife, and who is ultimately faced with a choice between two very different men, Devendra, the loving and understanding prison doctor, and Bikash, her lover from the past whose wife she murdered. The image was a deviation from the sati-savitri image showcased so often in the Hindi cinema.

It is true that Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) portrays Nargis in the role of a stereotypical mother who towards the end of the movie becomes a universal mother, defying the micro state of being a biological mother so as to transform into the mother of the nation, by killing her own biological son in order to save an innocent woman. But the movie can also be seen as a strong political statement about a woman who stands to make sure that justice has been done.

Film makers like K.A. Abbas, Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy portrayed strong female characters in their films, throughout the 1950s. They were shown to have a voice and an opinion of their own. Guru Dutt's *Kagaz Ke Phool* (1959) portrayed the character of an actress getting into an affair with a married filmmaker which consequently destroys the filmmaker while the actress later jilts him and goes on to become the biggest star of the industry. The movie shows a strong female character and a weak male character completely ruled and destroyed by his emotions. V. Shantaram's *Navrang* (1959) had a female protagonist who misunderstands and remains immune to her poet husband's talent and creativity and consequently leaves him.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anuradha* (1960) is about a city woman's momentary yet memorable rebellion against being taken for granted by her busy doctor husband along with whom she lives in

a remote, distant village. She chooses her husband when she is finally faced with a choice between her husband and her love for the city life. K. Asif's lavish *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) had Madhubala playing the role of Anarkali who daringly defies the formidable emperor with the song *Jab Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya*, a song that till date inspires suffering lovers. Anarkali refuses to reject the prince even when imprisoned by the emperor, giving up only in the end, by allowing the emperor to declare her dead to the world and to the prince (her lover), only to save the prince's life.

"Sometimes the tragedienne, sometimes the seductress, sometimes aggressive, and sometimes diffident beyond logic, both in happy and sad moments, the dignity of the Hindi cinema heroine remains untarnished. If anything it is overstated under extreme provocation" (Gulzar, Nihalani and Chatterjee 394). All of it shields the ordinary woman from being visible in Hindi cinema. But if one analyses the trends in cinema it can be seen that the actresses indirectly dictated the terms of their portrayal in cinema. Meena Kumari was portrayed as the tragedy queen, Madhubala was known and portrayed for her beauty and the camera focussed more on their face than on their body. Vyjayantimala was a very good dancer but was more of a decorative item in the movies she acted in. Waheeda Rehman was an exceptional actress with powerful acting skills. She successfully and beautifully blended her dancing skills with her acting prowess and the roles she chose so she could rise above the decorative quality of the characters she played. We saw her flouting her abusive marriage in the film '*Guide*' (1965).

The filmmaker Hrishikesh Mukherjee produced some memorable heroine-oriented films such as '*Guddi*' (1971) and '*Abhimaan*' (1973), '*Mili*' (1975), '*Khubsuroot*' (1980), and '*Majhli Didi*' (1967) '*Guddi*' was simple down to earth film which showed the heroine, as a simple girl-next-door, epitomising middle class sensibilities. The film shows how she matures from a regular chirpy girl into womanhood. '*Khubsoorat*' portrayed Rekha in the role of a simple deglamourised young girl who brings about changes for the better in a strict and authoritarian household. '*Abhimaan*' dealt with ego clashes between the two genders when a woman surpasses her husband in terms of musical talent and fame. '*Majhli Didi*', based on a Sarat Chandra novel, highlighted a woman's compassion and love for an orphaned child.

In *Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962), chhoti bahu takes to drinking alcohol and singing and dancing to lure her husband in a bid to prevent him from visiting courtesans only to fail miserably and ruin her life. In *Chitralkha* (1964), Meena Kumari played a dancer whose midlife crisis not only ruins her life but also the lives of the men in her life leading it all to a devastating end. In *Phool Aur Pathar*, Meena Kumari is again weepy and sanctimonious, taking all the insults meted out to her, first suffering at the hands of her cruel in laws and then at the hands of the society when she is uncaring of moral and social implications of standing by and living with a much hated and infamous criminal. In the fashion of stereotypes, she is presented as an epitome of goodness and simplicity.

Those decades also had portrayals where women characters survive despite all odds. *Bahurani* (1963) portrays the character of a village belle, Padma, who is deceived into marrying an older semi senile, mentally retarded and ill-treated son of a zamindar. She devotes her entire life to caring for him and fights his battles for him so as to assert his rights as the older son of the zamindar. In *Mujhe Jeene do* (1963) a courtesan reforms a dacoit, bringing out the humanist side in him. In *Jyoti* (1981) Gauri, a strong woman, is married to Govind, the son of the zamindar. The son is deliberately made mentally retarded by pills fed to him by his wicked stepmother. Gauri fights the conniving stepmother and her equally selfish son, both of whom maltreat Govind. She brings back the house in order teaching the wicked ones a lesson or two. *Beta* released in 1992, was made along the same lines.

With the advent of colour in 1960s, a trend of frivolous films was also seen where the hero concentrated on relentlessly wooing the heroine, his behaviour bordering on eve teasing and



harassment. Shammi Kapoor acted in numerous such movies. Actresses played stereotypical roles in mainstream Hindi cinema with their tight fitting, body hugging salwaar kamees and big bouffant hair styling. They were used mainly to augment the hero and to accessorise the sets. They danced around the trees with the hero and had little else to do other than fluttering their eyelashes and playing coy. “*Succinctly the focus shifted to the physical attributes of the leading lady and the songs of the 1960s bear testimony to how, gradually, the heroine is being transformed into an object of sexual desire.*” (Gulzar, Nihalani and Chatterjee 395). The actresses had more to do with fashion and style rather than characterization.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the phenomenal rise of the vastly popular or rather the king of romance as he was known, Rajesh Khanna. As Khanna’s popularity increased the heroines found themselves being dwarfed before his awesome presence on screen and within the masses. They were gradually being pushed to the background and only portrayed conventional roles on screen.

The decades of 1960’s and 1970s also saw heroines evolving in intriguing themes and roles. We see her as a haunting ghost in *Woh Kaun thi* (1964), a wanton call girl in *Chetna* (1970), a widow who dared to dream and to love again in *Andaz* (1971) and a courtesan who dared to dream and to love in *Pakeezah* (1972). Hema Malini in *Seeta Aur Geeta* (1972) played a dual role of identical twins separated at birth, one submissive and meek, the other outspoken and assertive. In *Sholay* (1975) she played the unconventional role of a chatterbox, horse-cart driver.

Zeenat Aman who had previously been a model and a beauty queen was more of a bold, unabashed sex symbol in the Hindi film industry. She capitalised on her sex appeal and played a range of roles in the span of her career. She dabbled with roles ranging from a prostitute (Manoranjan), an adultress (Dhund), a gangsters girlfriend trained in martial arts (Don), a victim of rape (Insaaf Ka Tarazu) among other unconventional and bold roles. Jaya Bachchan (*Kora Kagaz, Jawani Diwani, Guddi, Rampur Ka Laxman, Sholay*), Smita Patil (*Namak Halal, Arth*) and Shabana Azmi (*Karm, Arth*) discarded or stripped glamour as an unnecessary tool for the female lead’s character for such films. Such movies saw them playing roles that were as important as that of the hero. In the 1970s the heroine was further pushed to the background as she became an ornament who sang and danced in the film only to provide some relief to the audience from the hero’s relentless quest for revenge. The heroine’s feelings and life were secondary to that of the hero and thus emerged heroines as nothing more than glamour dolls. Their purpose was to bring in glamour and sex appeal to the film with clothes that accentuated their hour glass figure. This was the time when female cinematic characters lost substance. The impact of the hero, the whole trend of action films and the ‘*angry young man*’ image of Bachchan was so strong that the heroine actually faded into oblivion.

On the other hand parallel cinema, known for its strong and serious content that reflects realism and naturalism, provided an alternative with more meaningful roles where she wasn’t a subordinate. The films that came out had a keen eye on the economic and socio-political climate of the times.

Gulzar’s *Aandhi* (1975) was about a female politician who chose her career over her marriage, dispelling the myth that a woman needs a man to support her financially and emotionally. Shyam Benegal’s *Ankur* (1974) , *Nishant* (1975), *Manthan* (1976), *Bhumika* (1977) were films that portrayed strong and unconventional female character’s with conviction and courage.

Vinod Pande’s *Ek Baar Phir* (1980) saw the simple small town girl walking out on a loveless marriage with a self centered actor. Mahesh Bhatt’s *Arth* (1982) is about a woman who refuses to take back her husband who had earlier jilted her for another woman. She displays self-respect and dignity when she refuses to accept any kind of financial support from the husband and decides to live an independent life without any kind of financial or emotional support from a man.

Ketan Mehta demonstrated the strength of women with the film *Mirch Masala* (1985) when a group of village women together fight back a tyrant police officer. The major themes of the film are female empowerment, not in terms of independence but in terms of upholding their moral self, and resistance to male terror. The village women realise that they can protect themselves from the tyrant police officer, who physically abuses the women of the village, only when they assert themselves through their solidarity. The film explores many feminist issues through a very powerful narrative. The police officer symbolises power, as he is the revenue inspector and the villagers give in to his unreasonable demands in order to please him. Villagers, mainly the men, willingly bring women to him lest they incur his wrath. “Men unite in the efforts of maintaining patriarchal authority even as they themselves are exploited by the men in power in the social hierarchy. Women are subordinated to male control and desire – a subordination which is seen as necessary for patriarchy to continue.” (Jain and Rai 245). The police officer lusts after the female protagonist, Son Bai, who works in a spice factory with other women. She refuses to succumb to his unjust demands. Her husband is away as he works in the city. Son Bai takes refuge in the spice factory where other women along with the help of the old gate keeper lock down to factory in order to keep away the police office. As he forcefully enters the factory in the end, the women manage to defeat his purpose by throwing red ground chillies into his eyes. We see Son Bai standing with a sickle in her hand in the last scene symbolising the collapse of the structure of male supremacy. Another strong message that is delivered through the film is that work empowers women, the chilly spice becomes a mode of protection and the factory space provides them a place to hide from the hunter.

T Rama Rao’s *Nache Mayuri* (1986) featuring Sudha Chandran in the lead role has a disabled dancer overcoming her handicap to rise to pinnacle of her field. With films like *Ankur* (1974), *Sardari Begum* (1996) and *Mammo* (1994), Shyam Benegal has given us some unusual female characters that weren’t portrayed as stereotypes or for the purpose of objectification. Govind Nihalani in *Dhristi* (1990), *Rukmavati ki Haveli* (1991), *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* (1998) has presented a kaleidoscopic range of women characters. *Dhristi* deals with the issue of marital discord and different takes of men and women on the same issue, while *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* (1998) saw Jaya Bachchan giving a magnificent performance as a woman trying to come to terms and cope with the death of her son.

Prakash Jha’s *Mrityudand* (1997) comments on gender injustice that is prevalent in our society. The film is about educated Indian women, who rebel and fight for their rights attacking the very concept of male dominance in a relationship as well as in society. Basu Chatterjee’s *Triyacharittar* (1995) is a powerful film that explores how women are exploited in our society.

Coming back to mainstream cinema, the decades of 1980s and 1990s saw women characters becoming louder in terms of voice, articulation, dialogue, sexual aggression and even characterization. In B.R.Chopra’s *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (1980) we see a beauty queen who was raped and then denied justice because of lack of evidence and rampant corruption. When the same man rapes her younger sister, she takes matters in her own hands and kills the perpetrator. Lekh Tandon’s *Doosri Dulhan* (1983) saw the female being liberated to the extent that she readily sells her womb to a childless couple. The film was remade later as *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* in 2001. Rakesh Roshan In *Khoon Bhari Maang* (1988) depicted a woman who avenges her betrayal by her husband who tried to kill her so as to get his hands on her family money.

The heroines of Hindi films had no qualms about enticing the male, the object of their desire, with their unabashed body language which gave rise to the trend of song and dance routines like *Kaate Nahi Katate Din Yeh Raat* in *Mr India* (1987), *Dhak Dhak Karne Laga* in *Beta* (1992) and *Sexy Sexy Mujhe log Bolen* in the film *Khuddar* (1994). The heroines became more assertive and overstepped societal limits they didn’t care about. She was upfront and wasn’t afraid of having fun. The decades saw characters like Ganga in the film *Khalnayak* (1993) who is a cop, dresses up and

pretends to be a dancer in a gathering of some of the most dreaded criminals. In the film *Ganga* boldly sang and danced to the tunes of *Choli Ke Peechey Kya Hain*.

It wasn't just her image but also the social fabric that was changing. The heroines no longer played the sugar syrupy characters who were either expected to flutter their eyelashes or weep uncontrollably at the first sign of trouble. Slowly yet steadily the decorative role of the Hindi film heroine was changing. She was still subordinate to the hero, the hero still dominated the scene of the films but there were signs of the heroine emerging from the stereotypical cocoon. The change that was coming about in the society was reflected in cinema, and so the way females were objectified in Hindi films also changed.

Mahesh Bhatt's *Daddy* (1989) was about a daughter who takes charge of her alcoholic father. Yash Chopra's *Lamhe* (1991) had an orphaned girl who openly expresses her desire to marry her much older guardian, whose love was unreciprocated by her mother when she was alive. In *Laadla* (1994) we see a high headed business tycoon, a go getter, but towards the end we see her tamed or domesticated by the male protagonist. In *Judaai* (1997) we see a wife selling her husband to a rich woman who dearly loves him but seeks the wife's permission so she could convince her husband to marry the rich lady.

In the new millennium the heroine, though more outspoken and bold, is still fighting for gender equality and her rightful place in Hindi cinema. In *Lajja* (2001), Raj Kumar Santoshi's adaptation of Taslima Nasreen's novel by the same name, we see four oppressed women from different segments of our society. The film challenges tradition and raises multiple issues like dowry, sexual exploitation and harassment, domestic violence, manipulation of women at the hands of the men in their lives among other issues. The film makes a bold statement with reference to the condition of women in our society despite the advancement in various fields.

The women are comparatively stronger in films like *Dhoom*, *Dhoom II*, *Shaurya*, *Aitraaz*. Some of them do not differentiate between the heroine and the vamps, as the current batch of actresses don't mind playing negative roles as long as they make a lasting impression on the audience.

The new millennium influenced by globalization and the economic growth seen by the nation produces high-budget Hindi films and use promotional tools like direct marketing by the stars and are also influenced by Hollywood films. Thus it is easy to conclude that the portrayal of the woman is more like a borrowed or foreign portrayal which is sort of distanced from the regular, Indian woman. The film *Salaam Namaste* (2005), we see the female protagonist Amber who decides to move in with her boyfriend without marriage and then gives birth to their twins when he refuses to shoulder a parent's responsibilities, all of it without getting married to him. The character is indeed of a strong woman but the situation and the entire concept is just too alien for an average Indian woman. Not surprisingly the setting of the film is modern day Australia.

Ethical values have also changed to a large extent. Issues like premarital sex and adultery where the woman takes the initiative are depicted quite commonly in Hindi films and have been accepted by the audience. Films like *Astitva* (2000), *Jism* (2003), and *Gangster* (2006) are examples of this trend. In *Astitva* we see a woman giving birth to a child outside her wedlock and it is revealed much later to the husband that the boy he had been calling his own for so many years is actually a product of his wife's brief affair with another man. After discovering the truth, the husband and surprisingly the child, who has grown into a man, ask the woman to leave the household. In *Jism* we see a woman playing sexual games and manipulating the men in her life. She is the female lead as well as the vamp in the film. Despite the bold theme, the heroine or rather the vamp is still objectified. She is portrayed as a sexy siren wearing revealing dresses which invite male gaze from the men in the film



as well as the men in the audience, the mechanism of which have been elaborately discussed in chapter two. *Fanaa* (2006) had a bold portrayal of a blind woman who shoots the man she loves when she discovers his terrorist activities. Even so movies that show women in strong roles are too few

As far as objectification through costume goes, heroines in the films produced in the decades of 1990s and the new millennium wear western clothes and are not portrayed as sluts or vamps as opposed to the trend of 1960s, 1970s and to some extent 1980s. But she is still required to prove her Indian sensibilities. One such example is of the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) in which Tina comes to India from London in a mini skirt, which is fine, as long as she proves that at heart she's Indian and she achieves this by singing a devotional Hindi song.

In *Dhoom* (2004) we see a house wife in skimpy western attire but she is hardworking and loving and she proves the same by doing domestic chores like cooking and cleaning. However we also see a lot of Bollywood films where the heroine wears western clothes prior to her marriage and post marriage she wears traditional Indian clothes including the heavy jewellery that is supposed to transform her into the domestic stereotype of a wife.

Just like the portrayal of wives, vamps and girlfriends have changed over time with the changing values, the portrayal of mothers onscreen has also undergone a sea change over the years. Where the earlier portrayal of mothers was all-sacrificing and goddess like, the new mothers are no longer a weepy, figure clad in white. Instead, she dresses glamorously in designer clothes with traditional splendour, loves her children's little jokes and is not afraid or shy to dance with members of her generation or the younger generation at weddings and other functions, in fact she does so with pride and looks ravishing in the modern getup. They are their son's or daughter's best friend and at times even confidante. They urge their children to dream and to follow their heart in case of love or job or whatever the case may be.

The mother in *Dilwale Dhulania Le Jayenge* encourages her daughter to dream about love and see the world, live life on her own terms even though it went against the principles of her husband. She also encourages her daughter to leave home with her boyfriend when, to her, it looked like that the family would not agree to the union of the two. The mother in *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham* gave her blessings to her son who was banished from their house when the son had a tiff with his father.

Today the films portray single mothers as in *Koi Mil Gaya* (2005). In *Hum Tum* (2004) we see the single mother of the female protagonist hoping around the planet with her widowed daughter. She encourages her daughter to follow her dreams, and she herself is a wedding planner. The modern mothers are not restricted to their household and are not afraid to step out into the world.

The band of new mothers are gradually shifting the entire perspective and showcasing the concept that they have a life beyond their children and that it is not bad to strive for personal happiness. The film *Tehzeeb* (2003) showcased a workaholic mother because of which the portrayal throws a partially negative light on her. The patriarchal ideology surfaces again when the mother is portrayed as an unfit mother because she cares about her career. Though the stereotypical moulds have seen changes over time, they are still dominated by patriarchy.

Despite earnest films that have portrayed strong female characters in realistic way, the general trend that has been dominant over the years is that of women in stereotypical roles. Such films have been heralded and applauded by the masses appealing more to the chauvinistic audience. Heroines have been casted in self-sacrificing and suffering roles where they treat their husbands and families as their gods, serving them without any protest or expectations, submitting to their will bearing all the ill treatment meted out to them. Such has been the expectations and the mood of the society. Films that have shown women digressing from the established norms have the heroines suffering mental



and physical trauma. “Instances of women’s resistance are diluted to collude with the dominant discourse.” (Virdi 121). When women are given central roles in films, they suffer. Mehboob’s *Mother India* is a classic example.

Focussing on the love, romance, sexuality and family angles in Hindi cinema becomes important, even though they are used as tools to perpetuate stereotypes, but they also provides a compelling locus to examine womanhood. Analysing through these angles can help to see the way women are shaped in cinema and how they are imagined.

B. R. Chopra’s *Gumrah* (1963) deals with the issue of an extra marital affair between a married women and her ex-lover, a subject which is somewhat a taboo even now. The female protagonist, Meena, is happily married to Ashok. Her life turns chaotic when her ex-lover re- enters her life demanding to know the reason behind the abrupt termination of their affair. Meena recounts that after the sudden death of her sister, she had to marry her brother-in-law, Ashok, in order to take her sister’s place in the household and to be a mother to her sister’s children that she dearly loved even then. Sparks fly and Meena indulges in a secret extra marital affair with Rajinder who still loves her. In the end, after much deliberation, stress and mental trauma, Meena finds herself guilty, tormented by inner turmoil and torn between her desire for her ex-lover and her sense of duty and loyalty towards her family and children, she confesses everything to her husband and chooses to stay with him, honouring the sanctity of the institution of marriage.

We see a similar love triangle between Radha, Gopal and Sunder in the film *Sangam* (1964). We see Gopal sacrificing his childhood sweetheart so that his narcissistically self-absorbed friend Sunder, who fails to see the love between Radha and Gopal, can court her. Despite Radha’s love for Gopal, she ends up marrying Sunder and the two relocate to Europe where the distance from Gopal helps her reconcile with her situation. Gopal, being a friend of Sunder’s and intending no harm, keeps reappearing in their lives now and then. Eventually Sunder discovers the truth about Radha and Gopal and also the fact that Radha to some extent still loves Gopal. Sunder becomes jealous and is consumed by suspicion and self-destructive rage. In the Climax the three confront each other and Gopal, after confessing his longstanding love for Radha, kills himself. In the film, both Gopal and Sunder see Radha as a trophy who they are willing to give up in the name of friendship.

If one compares and contrasts the plight of Meena and Radha to that of the male protagonist in B.R.Chopra’s *Pati, Patni aur Woh* (1978), it can be seen that his agonies don’t torment him half as much as they torment Radha and Meena. The film dealt with the idea of a middle-aged man with a roving eye, falling for another woman other than the heroine or the wife, in this case his secretary. The film was made as a comedy and the complications that arise out of an extra-marital affair are fore grounded in the narrative, presumably because this time it’s a man who is having an affair. Even though he is shown as a good man whose wife is happy with him and who ardently loves his child, the affair for him is just something that provides a diversion from the monotony and boredom of marriage. When his wife discovers the truth, he gets over the fling without it causing any deep conflict to him and all is well in the end.

A similar situation can be seen in the David Dhawan’s comedy film *Biwi No.1* (1999). Prem is married to Pooja and has two kids. On the other hand he is having an affair with Rupali an aspiring model. Rupali is outgoing, outspoken, modern and fashionable in contrast to Pooja. When Pooja discovers the truth and asks him to choose between the two women, Prem moves in with Rupali. Pooja attempts to lure her husband back and transforms herself into a modern, fashionable woman, giving herself a complete make-over. In the end Prem comes back to his wife, who is ready to forgive and forget, without any of it causing much mental trauma and anxiety to him. Prem didn’t

really face any dilemma of love, the women did all the hard work trying to pull him to them. The film was one of the biggest hits of 1999.

Meena, Radha and Pooja, all of them see marriage as an institution that is sacred and needs to be kept intact. For Meena and Radha, duty is more important than love, and a marriage can be sustained without love. Destabilizing the marital equilibrium is nothing less than torture for these women. Meena in *Gumrah* fears social disgrace and social chastisement which is why she keeps her affair a secret from everyone. The men in *Pati, Patni aur Woh* and *Biwi No. 1*, on the other hand, do not fear any of it. Prem in *Biwi No.1* even walks out on his wife and children when asked by the wife to choose between her and the mistress. The underlying patriarchal assumption being that it is the women, not the men, who represent honour and stand for family and community name.

It is noteworthy that men and women react very differently to the same situation. Men “*vent their anger, shun the women and make them feel guilty. They are never shown to be in a compromising position – grovelling or pleading with their women.*” (Jain and Rai 245)

Mahesh Bhatt’s *Arth* (1982) is a film about a husband’s extra marital affair. Despite the wife’s repeated pleas the husband leaves to live with his mistress, Kavita, categorically telling Pooja, his wife, that he has made his decision and that it is final. Pooja practically grovels before him, begging him to stay but he turns a deaf ear to all her pleas. The latter half of the film sees Inder wanting to come back to Pooja, but not once do we see him grovelling like Pooja. Before Pooja refuses to take him back she promises to consider Inder’s request to give their marriage another chance. Inder had not shown Pooja the same courtesy.

In Aparna Sen’s *Paroma* (1984), we see the central character Paroma, portrayed as a middle class Bengali housewife, who has an extra-marital affair with a visiting foreign returned photographer, Rahul. The film gives us subtle hints of the male gaze on the female body as the camera focuses intensely on Paroma’s lips while she is eating. Rahul gazes at Paroma’s lips while she is nibbling her food taking small bites of a chilly. Rahul is a photographer and therefore decides to do a photo session of Paroma. For Rahul, Paroma’s body is a sexual artefact, an object of beauty that he is to capture with his camera while for the family and society her body is a servant. Rahul’s repeated gaze makes Paroma feel desirable which in turn makes her desire him. Close intimacy develops between Paroma and Rahul while the husband is away on business tours. Rahul exposes her to a new side of life which is exciting and rejuvenating for Paroma. When the affair is discovered by the husband, she is completely neglected and isolated by the family. She is made to feel guilty and dirty. The husband blames her for his mother’s illness stating that his mother is ill because of her wayward behaviour. This despite the fact that a few days ago, during a business tour his sexual advances are checked by his secretary, exposing the double standards of the patriarchal attitude of men. He even goes to the extent of calling his secretary a bitch because she refused to succumb to his demands. For him, whether it’s his wife or his secretary, a female is just a body that is to be possessed and not a human being having emotions or intellect. They are both there to fulfil his needs. The husband here makes the wife feel guilty for something he himself has indulged in.

In Prakash Jha’s *Mriyudand* (1997), Badi Bahu has an affair after her husband leaves her to live a celibate life of a priest, as a result of which she gets pregnant. The pregnancy is a source of joy for her for all through her married life she bore the allegations of being barren while it was her husband who was impotent. When the husband decides to leave her in order to become a priest she pleads him not to leave her and deprive her of the dignity of wifehood which means the world to her. The wife here is again grovelling, pleading before the husband who throughout their married life allowed his wife to be called barren in order to hide his impotency from the society.

The patriarchal ideology again surfaces in the films when we see Badi Bahu as well as Pooja wanting to have children, even if the child does not belong to the husband. While Badi Bahu is pregnant with another man's child, Pooja adopts her maid's daughter. The child in both the cases fulfils the female. For both of them, the child gives them the reassurance of being a worthy woman, since their husbands have left them. The underlying patriarchal assumption being that a woman needs either a man or a child in her life to give her a sense of identity or purpose in life. It is not the case with men, they don't need a wife or a child to reassure them of their worthiness.

After the independence, women in this country have worked in almost all spheres of the economy and are partially responsible for the growth of the nation, impacting both public and private spheres. But Hindi films only obliquely or tangentially refer to the struggles and hardships faced by the women in that arena and deny them the credit for their contribution in the growth of the economy. The changes that women have helped to bring about for the betterment and growth of the nation and the contribution that they have made in building up our economy are disavowed by the Hindi film industry.

It cannot be denied that Hindi cinema indeed constructs and portrays women as dummies who only serve to gratify the male audiences, reassuring men of their dominance and their importance. As for the future, it is clear that a change is needed in the representation of women in a discourse as popular and representative of society as Hindi cinema. Moreover it is evident that a change is gradually creeping in but it is still uncertain and tentative as to what that change is. The new emerging image of woman is still hazy. What it will be like is still confusing.

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**BIO-NOTE**

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