

CHAPTER - 1

The Womanly Woman:

The Desire Disclosed

What is a woman? Is it just a body only, that too a 'female' body, biologically different from a 'male' body? How does this female body view itself? Does it feel itself to be feminine? And if yes, who creates this 'feminine' identity? Is it biological, is it social and cultural or is it something entirely personal? Is it very necessary for a woman to be 'feminine'? And if yes, is she allowed to experience and enjoy her own femininity to her own contentment and satisfaction. There is an unending chain of questions like these that are directly linked to a woman's identity and experiences and desires at the level of her 'womanly' body.

One can start with the possibilities of women's experiences of everyday life and they seem to be closely linked to their notions of their body and their sexuality that they may realize in terms of identifying themselves. The female body is not just a 'body', that is, a 'physical' and 'biological' entity. More importantly, it is the 'living' and the 'lived' body; the 'communicating' and the 'communicative' body, and the most important 'body' through which the woman seeks to define herself, identify herself and express herself in different and various situations and contexts of day to day life.

Meenakshi Thapan has rightly called body "a medium of culture" as "we take care of it and maintain it, eat, dress and adorn ourselves, communicate with others, and so on ." [1997:173] But she also adds that the body is not only a text of culture, and quotes Susan Bordo in the context who calls body more directly "a practical...locus of social control" [as cited in Thapan:173]

Seen from that point of view, a woman is not what she wants to be but what she is made through culture. What actually happens is that in her pursuit of an 'ideal femininity', she forgets that it is ever-changing and even elusive. It seduces her indeed and the consequence that she seems to ignore is that it ultimately 'disempowers' her. It happens very spontaneously and naturally that those values take up residence in her mind that are actually oppressing for her. The same body that should be defining actually becomes limiting for her identity. Her identity is perceived in terms of the body only : the beautiful body, the well-shaped body, the perfect womanly body and so on. And she also begins to see herself in the same way. And besides this physical perception of the beauty of her body, there is one more biological aspect that is inseparably linked to it: the aspect of her own physical desire.

‘Sexuality’, as pointed by Sudhir Kakar, is the location of “two person universe where the affirmation of her female body and the recognition of her feminine soul take place simultaneously.” [Kakar,1990 :144]

When she comes to know and understand why and what for she is desirable, she is able to understand herself more in terms of her own body and the biological desires linked to it. She starts loving herself for her own femininity. And the moment she thinks of her fulfillment in her own way, the moment she is able to come out of all her inhibitions and express her inner most heart and body felt desires, and not only express but also find the ways of her contentment, she is immediately reminded of the ‘same body’ being a ‘sign’ or rather a ‘moral code’ which can not allow her to cross a specified limit set by the norms and rules of society. She is supposed to be the upholder of all the morality and the honour of the family, the state, and even the nation, and therefore, she cannot dare to move beyond the set boundaries.

Her body, in this sense, speaks about a social reality other than itself. Her body is an ‘image of society’ and even a ‘metaphor for society’, the medium through which meanings are produced, but only those meanings that constitute her femininity to be ‘desirable’ and more importantly ‘acceptable’ according to the so called standards of the society, set specifically for women. Her whole body becomes in itself a ‘moral realm’, a ‘conventional behavioural code’ she is supposed to maintain. Thus what the society wants is juxtaposed with what an individual wants. The moral issues take a hold over the woman’s life and her individual desires are pushed back and suppressed.

All these situations create a lot of conflicting situations for the real, living women, specifically those who are able to identify themselves, their own feelings, needs, desires, ambitions. And in the dire need of their own satisfaction and fulfillment, their desire to create their own identities out side the monolithic structures of patriarchy, social codes and norms, marriage etc., these women surpass all their mental blocks created by their strict social trainings (in the context of their being ‘women’), come out of all their existing inhibitions regarding their own body and sex, and decide to use their very own ‘female body’, the so called ‘moral realm’ to define ‘morality’ afresh, from their own point of view. Sometimes they do this secretively as they realize the importance of ‘social fabric’ and their need to be dependent on it for a

hassle free survival in society. And sometimes they come forward to do it openly also considering it as a 'right' to their pleasure, their fulfillment, their satisfaction and ultimately their identity, as they feel that they are able to exist more happily by being so assertive of their right 'to be a woman', and to be able to use their own body to their own fulfillment.

There exist so many social and psychological researches that highlight these aspects of the life of common women : working or housewives, who come ahead with all such revealing facts of their personal lives, when surveyed and questioned for the sake of any research undertaken for the understanding of 'woman's body'. In this context, there is one such research undertaken by Meenakshi Thapan, where she got the responses of women, specially on their personal relationships, and observed that "controlling women's assertiveness and independence through regulating their sexuality is an acknowledged method of the exercise of patriarchal power." [1977:181] And in the same research, one of her subjects came very boldly and openly to express what she felt about her own sexuality:

"I find living by myself very liberating...I got into many sexual encounters to prove to myself that I was sexually attractive...The marriage didn't erode my sexuality, my self or identity. Had the opposite effect. I could now assert myself in my other relationships. I'm much more uncompromisingly assertive now." [Thapan:182]

All such above mentioned researches based on the 'real' living women put up the possibilities for resistance that may exist in various possible ways. And the 'reel' personas are doing exactly the same. There have been made some films that portray such possibilities of resistance or rather are bold enough to give an expression to the desire of women who came forward with their 'body', neither to hate it for being a 'woman's body' that is just an object to be used by man, nor to confuse it with its instinctual desires on one hand and the strict social and moral codes on the other but rather to 'celebrate' it with all its beauty, liveliness and desirability, specifically for their own pleasure and fulfillment, and there own identity carved in their own individual way.

When any kind of control crosses its limits, it becomes suffocating and is then experienced as a form of violence. In such situations, it is natural that the trapped

ones, the victims resist. The film makers are thus exploring the social acceptability or unacceptability of the new understandings of family, desire, sexuality and pleasure. In this light, the film narratives constitute an interpretive commentary on culture, society and politics. And often the films play out in celluloid terms the tension between culture and sexuality. The films taken up for this chapter show how their female protagonists have resisted to socio-moral codes thereby celebrating their own femininity in terms of their sexuality.

The first film taken up for study is *Astitva (2000)*, directed by Mahesh Manjrekar.

*“Itna na mayoos ban tu kar zara zindadili
Kyon nahi dikhti tumhe vo kabra par khilti kali
Jisko kehte ho andhera din ki vo shuruaat hai
Zindagi kya baat hai, zindagi kya baat hai...”*

(Don't be so hopeless. Be a bit lively.

Why can't you see the blooming bud on the grave !

What you call darkness is actually the beginning of the day.

Wow life ! Wow life !...)

These endings lines of the beginning song from the movie *Astitva* very aptly present and instill the hope, the positivity as well as the possibility of crossing the boundaries of one's claustro-phobic existence and move towards the brighter side of life.

Astitva is a thought provoking film that defying the social structure of this rude society raised an issue that has beleaguered and fraught Indian women since generations. The life and character of Aditi (Tabu), the protagonist of the movie is a portrayal of the 'defining' boundaries of a woman's life who is 'marginalized' within the confines of her 'defined' identity set by the so called patriarchy; her realization of her own self that desires to exist beyond those strict and suffocating 'definitions' and ultimately her daring decision to cross every bounding boundary in search of the real identity of 'herself', carved out by her own self and more importantly to know and feel her 'natural' and 'real' self.

Aditi is a quintessential middle class wife we see around us every day: educated and intelligent; devoted to her home and family; aware of her husband's needs and constantly working at keeping him in comfort. Her husband Srikant Pandit (Sachin Khedekar) treats her as a chattel, sets do's and don'ts for her. She is relegated to kitchen affairs and upbringing of kids. (there too, ironically, the planning of kids in their life and any decision about that is a male prerogative) Aditi raises a pertinent question in this context: "*Tumhare plans tumhare khud ke liye hain, us mein main kahaan fit hoti hoon?*" (Your plans are for you yourself. Where do I fit in them?)

The husband has often one-night stands with other women and if he ever showers any love on the wife, it is when he needs to satiate his own sexual desires, without being the least bothered about her desire as a woman and her rights as a wife. Aditi too, takes it all very stoically like an ideal Indian wife.

Despite repeated complaints of Aditi of feeling lonely without Sri and even a child, Sri is bothered about his own progress giving a deaf ear to Aditi's demands and actually the needs, for both the emotional as well as physical fulfillment. She is not even allowed to take up a job even though the husband is away from home for months at a stretch. The only reason behind this is the 'male as provider syndrome'. At no cost Sri is ready to allow Aditi to take up any job as he considers himself the 'bread earner' for the family and is dead against the earning brought home by the wife. He hates it as "*bibi ki kamai*" (the earning by wife). Meghna (Smita Jaykar) Sri's friend's wife very aptly and bluntly sums up Sri as a "*male chauvinist pig*".

The film begins with Aditi in a typical Indian household with the husband going to office. Srikant's old friend Dr. Ravi Bapat (Ravindra Mankani) and his once divorced wife Meghna arrive from Goa and are promptly invited for lunch. Srikant's "*important appointments*" are instantly cancelled ; son Aniket (Sunil Barve) , who is engaged to a rather progressive woman Revaty (Namrata Shirodkar), is ordered to bring fiancée home and it is understood that Aditi will whiz up a "*chatpata*" (delicious) lunch .

Ravi and his wife arrive. The two friends down a few drinks and the situation is very symbolic: the women in the kitchen, the men in the garden; the women talking about their identity and self-respect or the lack of it, the men talking about women and

beaches and bikinies. The conversation is quite enough to understand the gap between the two sexes as propagated by the society, for centuries. Srikant shares with Ravi his discomfort at the thought of a working daughter-in-law. He doesn't want her to work but since she is determined to follow her mind and decisions, Sri is left with nothing except the helplessness of these (ironical) comments: "*She is a modern woman and a modern woman wants to be independent.*" Sri offers her job in his own company but she rejects that offer very frankly: "*Vo to mai kabhi na karun*" (I would never do that) giving the logic that she would not like to work in her father-in-law's company as the lack of fear and competition there would kill all her motivation to work. Sri is confused regarding the marriage of Ravi also with Meghna who is a divorcee with two daughters. And this is enough to put before us the real character and mindset of Sri. In the next situation when all are sitting together, we can see Sri very bluntly taking and opening the letter that comes for Aditi. He justifies himself in the name of being a husband and says: "*Are biwi to meri hai na! Kya farak padta hai*" (It's my wife, no! What difference does it make!). He takes Aditi for granted as his wife who has to follow what the husband desires. Even Aditi is shown to be not bothered about Sri's attitude. It is as if she has got so accustomed to her life's realities that she does never even think about her ownself. The letter reveals that Aditi has received a large legacy and Sri starts laughing in an exaggerated manner reading that letter. He cruelly teases her about the fact that she has received a large legacy. He makes fun of her that she is now rich and salutes her very ironically. Aditi feels only confused over the letter that has come and Meghna is shown to be expressing a feeling of shock at such behavior of Sri but then everything stops there and then with lunch as the conclusion.

The seed of suspicion is however, sown in Sri's mind with that letter and the legacy that Aditi acquires. He flips back through the pages of the diary he regularly writes and comes up with the conclusion that he could not have conceived their son. He calculates all the dates and comes to realize the fact that their son Aniket was born in eight months after he got to know about Aditi's pregnancy, and he was not a premature baby also.

He asks Aditi directly about it and instead of hiding the truth or trying to manipulate the situation at any possible level (that she could have done very easily), she frankly admits the truth and tells him that Aniket is the son of Malhaar Kamat (Mohnish Bahl), her music teacher. The startling honesty of Aditi is a brilliant

moment in the film. Immediately after her confession, she gets a slap on her face which actually is a slap on honesty and truthfulness of a woman. Sri's veneer as the loving husband melts. Ego shattered, he only looks to balm his hurt manhood by emotionally devastating his already broken wife. The next day, Ravi and Meghna are called and despite Aditi's requests to tackle the issue personally, she is forced to speak out and confess everything even in the presence of Aniket also. What seems to be of utmost importance to Sri is that people should know the whole truth and he only should not be held responsible: "*Sabse zaroori baat hai ki logon ko asliyat ka pata chale. Mai nahi chahata ki log sirf mujhe doshi thehraayen*". (It is important that people should know the reality. I don't want people to blame me only.) Here Sri violates her right to privacy also and exposes his marital relationship to the public view thus humiliating Aditi even more. Meghna resists all this and gets up to leave but Aditi requests her to stop there for her sake as she decides to tell all that had happened in her past which now stands in front of her as a big blame.

Aditi narrates that once when Sri was away for some business related work, her sister along with her husband had come to stay. The restless and lonely Aditi saw their unbridled love and felt more the pain of separation from Sri and also realized the lack of that warmth of love in her relationship with Sri. The guests went but Aditi's desires burnt her more. Her music classes were already going on and the situations took her closer to her music teacher who had started showing more sympathy and concern towards her, sensing her loneliness. They started touching each other at times and Aditi very frankly tells that she didn't even feel the need to stop him. She rather liked all as it was filling the emptiness in her personal life. The 'touches' touched her deeply and she confesses again that although she was astonished at Malhaar's daring to touch her very closely in one situation, yet she didn't resist: "*Uski himmat par mujhe aashcharya zarur hua magar uska sparsh mai rok nahi saki. Shayad mai isi ki talaash me thee.*" (I wondered at his daring but I could not resist his touch. Perhaps I was in search of the same.) The lines very clearly reveal her desire to be touched, to be loved, to be caressed by a man and Malhaar in that situation was the loveliest respite. On the one hand, she very honestly tells about her desire that was making her weak but on the other she reveals the conflicts also that can overpower the mind of any woman who is unconsciously trained in strict socio-moral codes. She tells that she used to enjoy Malhaar's company but felt ashamed also afterwards: "*...lekin uske*

jaane ke baad mere dil me uthate hue khayaalon se sharm aati mujhe.” (But after he went, I used to feel ashamed of the feelings that arose in my heart.) There existed a great conflict between desire and reality. Everyday she used to take a decision as to ask him not to come to her anymore but could never implement it as she herself used to wait desperately for him to arrive. Ultimately one day she surrendered to her desire that had overpowered every reality and every guilt of hers. Her statement “*Us ek lamhe ne mujhe kamzor saabit kar diya*” (That one moment proved me weak.) on the one hand shows the power of strict moral codes prescribed for women, but on the other also proves the naturalness of desire that a woman is vulnerable to and therefore the powerlessness also of the same codes that try to restrain her on various grounds. Aditi had felt very guilty again after going so intimate to Malhaar. She had even thought of killing herself but that also she didn’t do as she didn’t want Sri to face the whole world for her mistake. It is remarkable and strange that one moment can be both a ‘mistake’ and ‘fulfillment’ at the same time for a woman and actually both the interpretations again reflect the gap between ‘morality’ and ‘desire’. She tried to tell the truth also to Sri but the situations never allowed her to do so. Malhaar had already been asked by her not to visit her anymore. When Malhaar requests her not to be so harsh to him, she tells him that for her it was just spur of a moment: “*Kal jo hua vo ek lamha thaa*” (What happened yesterday was just a moment.) when her body had just held her mind. She says that she is neither blaming Malhaar nor would ever blame him for what happened between them. We come across one more situation of the overpowering ‘gap’ between desire and morality as although she accepts honestly her own sexual urge, yet sidelines Malhaar saying that she was with Malhaar’s body with Sri’s face on it. Malhaar comes to meet her and the child after he comes to know of it. He is contented to see his child but even then Aditi says that it is not his child. Malhaar, understanding the situation, goes away with the promise that he will keep it a secret. And the moment Malhaar goes away, Aditi turns back to see him. The tears and pain in her eyes reveal everything unrevealed. They show now the guilt of hurting Malhaar, the guilt of depriving him of his own child, the guilt of ‘hiding’ the reality of the moment that was her own choice. She narrates very truthfully all her feelings of joy, love, pleasure, guilt and everything that had happened in her past and that she was asked to tell about. Then Sri asks Ravi what he should do then and Ravi as well as Meghna suggests him to forgive Aditi considering it an “*insaani bhool*” (mistake committed by human being) and more for her honest confessions and her

unconditional love and concern for Sri and the family. Sri is not ready to forgive her. Even Ravi's reminders of Sri's own marital infidelities are swept aside bluntly as he says that even if he had some relationships outside marriage, he never brought the results of his infidelities home. And he goads Aditi mercilessly for her infidelity.

Moreover, even the son Aniket, on knowing the truth, gets too harsh to Aditi and rejecting even her touch says: *"Do not touch me you bloody. Don't you dare touch me."* Later on, when Aditi goes to his room, he even asks her very bluntly to *"get out"* saying:

"Oh God! Is aurat ke pet se mujhe paida hi kyon kiya!"

(Oh god! Why have you given me birth from the womb of this woman !)

An unforgiving Sri, however, wants her to stay back, actually to guard his secret (that he is impotent) from the prying world. Then Revaty refuses to marry Aniket and all hell is let loose. But nobody seems to be bothered about the shattered dream of Aditi whose big fault is actually her honesty. Neither the husband who she kept loving despite his ambitious workalcoholism; his dalliances with other women and even his own inability to father a child, nor the son, are ready to accept her. For them, she is just like every other 'thing' in the house which she cares. For those cold callous cruel men, she doesn't exist at all as a human being : a woman, a wife, a mother. They don't wish to forgive her, are not ready to accept her and at the same time expect her to beg forgiveness and stay back, that too, very authoritatively as Sri says to her:

"Tum kahin nahi jaogi. Isi ghar me rahogi. Apne pati ke saath jo tumse kabhi baat nahi karega."

(You will not go anywhere. You will stay in the same house, with your husband who will never talk to you.)

So she is asked to stay back, or rather ordered to stay back, not for the sake of her identity, her honour or her dignity but rather for their own sake, and more importantly for the sake of their safe and unblemished social identity.

She is still at the margins, despite giving her whole being for the welfare and care of the family, and the men, including both the father (not actually even the biological one) and the son, remain at the centre, the bosses of the family, the chief decision makers who can pass judgements on Aditi, simply forgetting the significance of her presence and existence in their lives. Initially Aditi is simply like those women who get so accustomed to all the oppression that they just fail to recognize their own 'self'. They rather forget the 'real' self that lies with them but takes a back seat because of constant oppression and due to strict moral and social codes and situations that surround them so much that they become all pervading, putting an end to all their mental growth. But as we all know, the 'reality' of 'real' can not be suppressed for long. All suppression accumulates angst and bitterness and ultimately results in a natural blast, just like the eruption of a long asleep volcano. Aditi's life is a perfect example of this situation.

A woman is a man's shadow. This the film brings to the fore as it is so intricately embedded in the socio-cultural fabric that unless a woman is jolted out of it, she goes on accepting it unquestioningly and reconciles to it as her lot. Aditi is like that. Meghna, from the very beginning, dislikes and disapproves what Sri does to his wife. Tired of her drab existence and repeated insults, the marginalized, the oppressed and the suppressed Aditi decides to leave home. The decision is painful, coming as it does after long years of marriage, loneliness and subordination. But her husband's callousness forces her to realize her own condition of homelessness and worthlessness. It is then that she decides to draw upon her strength.

Aditi's decision portrays her progress from shock to realization. Sri is the accuser, the jailor and the judge- all on his own. Now it is Aditi's decision to choose between a life of indignity and humiliation or freedom in the real sense. And obviously, she chooses the freedom with dignity.

It is in the nuances of the characters of Revaty and Meghna also that womanhood emerges. Revaty finds the reflection of her own future in the mother-son relationship and breaks engagement with Aniket. Meghna has always been supporting Aditi asking her to sustain and maintain her self-esteem: "*Never mortgage your self-esteem....*" She has always tried to make Aditi realize her own worth asking her to start doing something instead of being merely a housewife and on Aditi's reluctance

she even motivates her, saying: “*It’s never too late.*” So ultimately realizing her reality and her worth, the docile and submissive Aditi emerges a resolute and resilient person. She walks out of Sri’s life, her own family, aspiring and moving towards some more open spaces, the vigorous and fluid world full of love, life and spontaneity. Aditi ultimately breaks her silence and moves on to the final crusade that brings to her the dawn of a new day after a dark and horrifying night. In the end she says:

“Aaj mujhe ghar chhodte hue koi afsos nahi ho raha hai. ‘Srimati Aditi Srikant Pandit’ ...is naam me Aditi kahin kho gayi thee. Aaj khula aasmaan use bula raha hai. Mai besabr hoon apna astitva dhoondhane ke liye. Haan, mann me bechaini zaroor hai lekin darr bilkul nahin hai....Is umar me aisa lag raha hai ki mera naya janm hua hai.”

(I am feeling no regrets today while leaving home. Srimati Aditi Srikant Pandit: Aditi had got lost somewhere in this name. The open sky is calling her today. I am desperate to look for my existence. Yes, there is a bit of restlessness in mind but no fear at all. I feel as if I have taken a new birth now, in this age.)

She moves beyond all the boundaries and margins set for her, listening to the call of her inner urge, the urge to be herself and the film ends with the lines:

*“Na katungi
Na jalungi
Na mitungi
Na marungi
Mai thee
Mai hoon
Mai rahungi.”*

(I would not get cut
I would not get burnt
I would not die
I was there
I am there

I will be there.)

Mrityudand (The Death Sentence-1997) directed by Prakash Jha, the next film for analysis is an uplifting story about the power of self belief and togetherness, and it shows how far one can go by summoning up the courage and demanding one's right to be respected. It inspires women to fight for dignity and independence, even when facing the cruellest, the strongest and the most evil of opponents.

Mrityudand is set in a remote village in Bihar and is a story of three women in a Bihar Village who are being terrorized by men and how they rebel against their physical and emotional violence. The underlying story of the film is about Ketki (Madhuri Dixit) who gets married to the younger son Vinay (Ayub Khan), of a landlord (Pyare Mohan Sahay) who is financially weak now and lives on past glory. The village is ruled by a contractor and broker Tirpat Singh (Mohan Joshi), aided by the local politician Pandey (Harish Patel). The MLA and the contractor stay together to achieve what they want even if it means destroying family peace. They come out to create a hostile gap between two brothers, Abhay (Mohan Agashe) and Vinay. Abhay, the elder son, decides to leave married life and performs the rituals necessary to be a temple priest (*a mahant*). He rather murders the temple head and gets himself ordained as his successor. The result is that he gives up all worldly pleasures and leaves his wife Chandravati (Shabana Azmi) who must now live without him. Otherwise also she has been the long suffering wife who for seventeen years of her marital life has been emotionally and physically abused by her husband.

In the mean time, Vinay gets married to the educated young woman, Ketki. As Vinay struggles to keep the household going, Ketki aides him to start off his own entrepreneurial venture as a contractor, but Vinay becomes a pawn in the hands of Tirpat and Pandey. He starts abusing Ketki physically as well as emotionally, warning her not to interfere with his affairs. She learns that she cannot keep all of this to herself. She watches as her sister-in-law lives painfully alone and as her help, Kanti (Shilpa Shridokar), is being forced by her husband to go into prostitution in order to pay off his debt. She teaches them that women must be strong and bold enough to fight back. Ketki starts fighting her husband while he manhandles her. When Vinay finds out that he has been cheated, he decides to apologize and unite with his wife to enjoy life. However, Ketki's life takes a turn when her husband is killed in a planned

bomb explosion. Kanti revolts against an antagonist and his gambling partner when she calls them both pimps, and shows them what women are capable of (a great scene in the movie). Chandravati fights back in a less violent way by falling in love with Rambharan (Om Puri), a sympathetic lower caste merchant who has been giving loans to the landlord's family. Unfulfilled Chandravati's relationship with Rambharan turns sexual. She is still married to her husband but she finds solace and heaven with her lover. Moreover, she discovers she is not sterile. So each woman is fighting. One fights for her woman rights, one fights for her loneliness, and one fights for her unborn child she must raise on her own.

In the context of the present analysis, the focus at present will be specifically on the character of Chandravati whose character shows a drastic growth. She is the elder daughter-in-law of the house but has no say or voice in the family. She is shown to be very docile and submissive in the beginning of the film. The husband dominates and if she ever tries to resist, she is very bluntly asked not to interfere in the family affairs: "*Aap beech me mat boliye. Koi rai nahi maanga gaya hai aap se.*" (Don't interfere. Your opinion has not been sought.) She is childless and despite it being the husband's weakness, she is blamed for everything. Her situation is a perfect example of the oppression by patriarchy that dominates not only the thinking of men but even women as well. The village women consider the doings of man acceptable and woman is blamed for every loss. Their manner of consoling Chandravati in her grief when the husband is about to leave ultimately leaving her alone altogether (as he is the '*Mahant*' of a *math* (temple) now and can no more stay at home as a man of family) is revealing of the unconscious influence of patriarchy that very ironically becomes a conscious cause of a woman's torture at various planes: "*Ab ka bataayen, aadmi hai, jo chaahne kar sakta hai....aaj badi dulhan ka kokh bhara hota to bau sahib kabhi aisa nahi kar paate.*" (Now what to say ! He is a man and can do whatever he feels like doing....Had the elder daughter-in-law not been childless, the elder son would never have been able to do so.) The patriarchal ideology places supreme importance to 'ethical' motherhood. Chandravati herself has tolerated her violent and insensitive husband for the long seventeen years accepting all blames and atrocities and she is shown to get so much accustomed to her torturous life that she is unable to think of her own self and her own existence, without the concrete physical presence of the husband. Despite all the indifference and inhuman attitude of the husband, she is

shown to be literally begging before him asking him not to leave her like that. Nowhere at that moment can we see any trace of resistance on her part that may prove her assertion over her rights as a wife. The beginning of the film has portrayed her as a simple submissive wife who has learnt only to surrender but never to protest as she herself submits : “*Kabhi kuch nahi bole, kabhi muh nahi khole.*” (I never spoke anything. I never even uttered anything.) But all her meek requests go in vain as the husband’s decision stands unchangeable. It’s not only the husband who leaves her alone to suffer but even the family elders also are shown to be the least bothered about her loneliness, her pain. They have nothing to do about the plight of a suffering woman and are much concerned about the household that they will have to manage in the absence of their elder son, that is, the ‘man’ of the house. When Chandravati’s brother-in-law Vinay shows his concern about her, he is silenced by the expression of the elders’ more serious worries: “*Are uska ka! Kaashi Mathura kar ke kisi tarah time nikaal degi. Tum socho ghar khaandaan kaise chalega.*” (What of her! She can pass her time in Kaashi or Mathura. Just think how the household and the family would go!) The words show the status of a woman where she is not considered the essential part of the family and perhaps not a human being also with simple human emotions and aspirations.

She is so much devastated by the harsh realities of her situations yet remains the same surrendering woman until the younger daughter-in-law Ketki makes her realize repeatedly the wrongs of even tolerating injustice at the hands of men, the so called stake holders of family and society. Chandravati overhears a verbal dispute between Ketki and her husband when the husband is trying to make Ketki realize her “*aukaat*” (status) as a wife, as a woman. Ketki dares to confront her husband making him realize his own status : “*Aukaat ko taakat ka taraazu me tolne ka kosis mat keejiye. Aap hamare pati hain, pameswar banane ka bhool mat keejiye.*” (Don’t try to weigh the status in the balance of power. You are my husband, don’t commit the mistake of becoming God.) She asks Ketki to accept her reality as a wife and a woman thereby following the dictates of her husband : “*Aadmi to aisa hi hot hai dulhin. Uska maan lene me hi bhalaa hai.*” (Man is like that only sister-in-law. It’s better to follow him.)” And Ketki retorts back : “*Maan to aapne bhi rakha thaa. Ka bhalaa hua aapka?*” (Even you had honoured your husband. What good it turned up for you?) Chandravati has no answer and the quietness on her face can be interpreted

in various ways. It could be her helplessness and more than that her foolishness also to tolerate and suffer without any grievance. Somewhere deep it perhaps makes her aware of her own responsibility for all her pains as she succumbed to the victimization and never even thought of protesting against all that was choking her very existence.

Chandravati gets ill when her husband leaves and her condition gets worse. She is taken out of the village and since Vinay is completely drunk, it's Ketki and Rambharan who have to take her for treatment. It's a very stormy night with heavy rains and with a great difficulty she is managed to get medical aid well in time. She is unconscious and Rambharan has to lift her in his arms to protect her from heavy rainfall. The physical storm in this situation is symbolic of many forthcoming storms in the lives of many characters and specifically Chandravati. A quite significant scene follows when Chandravati is lying after getting medical aid, her hand on the hand of Rambharan and Rambharan gets up to leave. We are stunned at the daring of the same submissive Chandravati who holds his hand back and the feelings of gratitude and desire are clearly visible in her eyes.

Ketki stays with Chandravati to take care of her and in the meantime Vinay realizes his follies and faults and sends a letter to Ketki asking for forgiveness. Ketki is not ready to surrender so easily to the whims of a man. And then again Chandravati expresses her submissive state of mind asking Ketki not to be so rigid :

“Abhi nai ho na chhoti ! Haath paunv chalte hain, lad sakti ho. Kabhi kabhi jeet bhi jaogi. Jab haarne lagogi to ladna chhodkar sehnaa shuru karogi. Tab pataa chalega aurat hone ka matlab.”

(You are young. Your limbs function, you can fight. Sometimes you will win also. When you start losing, you will leave fighting and start tolerating. Then you will understand the meaning of being a woman.)

And Ketki says: *“Magar aurat hi kyon sehti rahe hamesa?”*(But why should the woman alone suffer always?)

Still Chandravati says: *“Yahi niyam hai.”*(This is the rule.)

So the character of Chandravati repeatedly puts before us the strict social training that sometimes becomes such an inseparable part of a woman's subconscious psyche that she is unable to think beyond that until the life itself gives her a jolt or puts before her such a situation that is able to dominate her whole existence more strongly. This happens with Chandravati also. All the physical and mental suppression of her barren and lonely life melts when she gets the company of Rambharan who shows a lot of care and concern for her. His caring attitude provides her a breath of freshness and vitality. She feels attracted towards him and we see in the following scenes that she desperately waits for him to come. She gets conscious of her looks also when he is about to come. Chandravati seems to have got a new life which she wants to live following her own desires. Both take care of each others' choices even in the matter of food. One day Rambharan brings a saree for her asking her very lovingly to accept his gift : "*Inkaar mat karna dulhin. ...hamesa saada kapda achha nahi lagta na.*" (Please don't say no....Simple clothes don't look good always.) She is very happy to see that saree for her and immediately wearing that comes out of her room to ask Rambharan how does she look. She was frying some namkeen for him and forgot to remove the utensil from the burner out of her excitement of getting saree. Then she realizes and before she could do it, Rambharan in his attempt of helping her gets his hand burnt. Now it is her turn to take care and immediately she puts his hand in the water to protect it from further sensation of burning. They touch each other again and this scene is actually a prelude to their coming physically close to each other. Both of them realize the proximity and she removes her hands from his but he again holds hers. She leaves him again and moves away. And the situation has been picturised very subtly and beautifully with ambivalence of desire in a woman's eyes. She too desires the man but is hesitant and perhaps indecisive also as it is not easy for a woman, who has always remained docile and submissive, to come out so easily of the social and moral traps the society creates for a woman. The hesitant Chandravati's retreat right into the bedroom, however, reveals her dominating desire to be close to Rambharan. He incites her more and ultimately she follows the voice of her craving and desiring body and comes into his arms. She hugs him closely crying. Her eyes show desire as well as fear but the 'desire of a woman' wins. She makes love with Rambharan and gets herself fulfilled defying all social, moral and cultural codes. The love making scene is a victory of a woman's right over her body against all odds. The scene ends with Chandravati crying in the arms of Rambharan and he is

wiping her tears. Her tears represent various aspects of the life and mental state of a woman. The cry could be a cry of fulfillment on acquiring the pleasure that her body possesses the capacity to provide and which perhaps she was unaware of till that moment. It could be a cry of regret over so much delay in her decision to exercise the right on her own body, her own self, her whole existence. But whatever it is, the situation depicts a significant growth in her character where a completely unassertive woman realizes her strength to assert. And then there is a sequence of various situations showing Chandravati grow to more boldness and courage.

She is in a temple and on being asked by Rambharan what she has asked from God, she replies that she has only thanked God for what she has got. Rambharan asks: “*Ka mil gaya?*” (What have you got?) and her reply “*Sab kuchh*” (Everything) is highly expressive of her achievement that she has got for herself. We come to know that she is pregnant and it instills in her a peculiar kind of strength as on being asked to protect herself from the rain that very moment, she is unbothered : “*Kuchh nahi ho sakta hamko ab. Na baarish galaa sakti hai na aag jalaa sakti hai na havaa bahaa sakti hai. Pavitar ho gaye hum.*” (Now nothing can harm me. Neither can rain melt me, nor can fire burn me, nor even can wind blow me. I have become pious.) Rambharan is shown to be a bit stunned but her happiness knows no bounds on being free of the blame of being ‘barren’: “*Baanjh nahi hain ham Rambharan. Baanjh nahi hain hum.*” (I am not barren Rambharan. I am not barren.) and she hugs him to share her newly acquired joy of knowing her status of an expectant mother. Although this situation possesses the tendency to be interpreted in the light of the same narrow mindset of the society which considers ‘motherhood’ to be a boon and an important factor so far as the honour and status of a woman is concerned. But the present point of argument here is simply the awareness of her existence where the ‘body’ plays an important role in making her realize her own inner potentials as well as desires and also the pleasures of fulfillment. She is happy that she is not barren without the least botheration about the socio-moral codes of conduct. In complete defiance of patriarchal prohibitions, her pregnancy also becomes a strategy to exercise her right on her body and her womb. Her out of wedlock pregnancy subverts the much prevalent notion of ‘ethical motherhood’ and ‘morality’.

She has to go back home to meet Ketki after Vinay dies in an explosion. Rambharan resists her going but we observe, as pointed out by him also, that she is

adamant and shows concern only about what she feels like doing and she is ready to go despite her pregnancy that is 'out of wedlock'. This is one more step forward where she is shown free of all social fears. Her defiant return to home sets the path to her emancipation. She reaches to Ketki and expresses her grief and concern for her. During the conversation, Ketki all of a sudden realizes her pregnancy and the conversation that follows is stunning as well as remarkable:

“Chandravati : Sab niyam tod diya hum.

Ketki : Kaise? Nahi didi ! Tumne !

Chandravati : Haan

Ketki : Khud ! Apni marzi se !

Chandravati : Haan.....pehla baar to apni marzi kiye hain hum. Kab tak koi mane ye niyam aur kaise hain ye niyam! Jo hot hai sahe jao, sahe jao. Kab tak aur kiske liye?

Ketki : Socha hai ka hoga ?

Chandravati : Ab jo bhi ho.

Ketki : KISKA HAI ?

Chandravati : MERA.”

(Chandravati: I have broken all the rules.

Ketki: How? No didi. You?

Chandravati: Yes.

Ketki: Yourself? With your own will?

Chandravati: Yes....I have followed my will for the first time. How long can one follow these rules and what kind of rules are these? Just tolerate and tolerate what happens. How long and for who?

Ketki: Have you thought what will happen?

Chandravati: Now whatever may happen.

Ketki: Whose child is this?

Chandravati: MINE.)

The same Chandravati always giving lessons to Ketki about the so called “*niyam*” (norms) of society asking her to follow them, has herself made a mockery of all those ‘*niyams*’. She never knew while getting physically involved with Rambharan

that she would be able to get the privilege of motherhood also but now since she has got it, she is more than happy. She crossed the ‘*laxmanrekha*’ (the line of control) to fulfill her desire as a ‘woman’ only but that further rewarded her the ‘motherhood’. And the use of the very word “*mera*” (mine) for the coming child shows her emancipation as well as empowerment where she expresses her right over everything that belongs to her: whether it is her desire, her womanhood, her choice and decision to transgress, or her motherhood and her child. She is shown to grow more and more and move towards the bold acceptance and assertion of all that is hers.

She becomes so strong that she faces her husband also very boldly this time when he comes to scold and blame her for being a “*kalankini*” (sinner). Ketki comes for her rescue but she herself comes forward to confront all his verbal as well as physical violence. When *Mahanta* catches her by neck, very ironically and bravely she invites him to offend him more saying: “*Badiye mahanta ji. Aise hi sahi. Kum se kum ek baar aapki taakat bhogne ka sukh to mil jayega humko.*” (Come forward Mr. Mahanta. Let it be like this. At least once, I will be able to have the pleasure of your power (of manhood).) This statement exposes *Mahanta* publically. He is no more able to stay there but she doesn’t allow him to go so easily and following him says in a more aggressive tone:

“Dhongi kahin ke! Hum to mar gaye the na aapke liye. Phir kahe palat ke aaye aap? Apna adhikaar jatane! Apna taakat dikhane! BOLO! Ka soch ke aaye the ki aurat hai, jab chahe aaghaat kar denge, jis tarah chahenge, tod denge....Aurat ka deh me bhi praan basta hai Mahant ji. Jeena chahate hain HUM BHI.”

(Hypocrite! I was dead for you. Then why have you returned to me? To exercise your right on me! To show your power to me! Speak up! Have you come back taking me to be a woman who you can attack anytime, break anytime?....Even a woman’s body has life in it. I too want to live.)

The severely humiliated *Mahant* goes away but wants Chandravati to be punished more severely for her ‘*kalanka*’ (sin). With the help of Tirpat Singh, he is able to gather the whole village in his favour and a vast group of men gather and

move towards the residence of Chandravati. There happens what these so called ‘patriarchs’ would never have imagined. A whole lot of women has already gathered there at the information of Tirpat Singh’s wife. A bloody struggle ensues and ultimately Ketki shoots Tirpat Singh down. The film ends with a wonderful speech in the background, valourising the role of a woman and more importantly the mother whose upbringing matters most as Ketki’s voice becomes every woman’s voice saying:

“Kamzor mat samjho humko. Mat chheeno hamse jeevan ka sammaan. Abla nahi hain hum. Aurat ka dharm nibhaya hai humne. Ab maa ka kartavya bhi nibhaungi. Sneh se seenchoongi apni santaan ko aur sikhaungi use : anyaaya kabhi karna mat aur uske aage jhukna bhi mat.”

(Don’t consider us weak. Don’t snatch away from us the honour of living. We are not meek women. We have fulfilled the duty of a woman. Now I’ll fulfill the duty of a mother. I’ll rear my child up with love and teach him/her: Don’t ever do injustice and don’t also surrender to it.)

The speech is significant to realize the role of a woman as mother. She only can impart such values to her children that may result in honour to women. It is important to understand it specifically in the context of the ‘voice’ against injustice of any kind.

Chandravati’s character has been used as mode of resistance if we see the growth of the whole film itself. The film begins with a brutal scene where a violent and abusive crowd of men is chasing a pregnant woman, as, according to them, she has violated the social norms of chastity. She is a widow but now pregnant from another man. Her exercising her right on her body is a crime in their eyes and they become the decision makers to pronounce ‘*mrityudand*’ (death sentence) to her for this violation. She is killed for her daring and the crowd of conservative patriarchs is victorious at their attempt to curb a woman’s voice of her right to her body even in the form of motherhood. And the film ends with Chandravati’s daring to go ahead with her decision fearlessly. Although the “*mrityudand*” is the final judgement decided for her act of violation also, yet the ‘*vadh*’ (killing) of the Tirpat Singh by Ketki stands

symbolic of the silencing of each and every voice that attempts at curbing the voice of a woman on her rights as a woman, as a mother and more importantly as an ‘individual’.

Mirch (2010) directed by Vinay Shukla is the next film for analysis. When this film was released, the audience were forewarned that the film would talk of four adulterous people. But adultery is nothing new for the audience to watch . So what is new in *Mirch*? For a change, it is the woman this time. All the four protagonists of the four stories woven together in this film– within–film format, are shown into adultery. One pertinent issue here is that what society calls adultery is actually ‘the celebration’ of the ‘womanhood’, of the desire , of the self–determinism of these women who indulge in sexual relationships with partners of their choice, depending on their desires, needs and situations . The director Vinay Shukla himself has called the film “a celebration of womanhood” [as cited in a review by Taran Adarsh; . entertainment.oneindia.in › Entertainment › Bollywood › [Reviews](#)]

The film starts with Maanav (Arunoday Singh), a script writer who has been struggling for two years for his script to be accepted by some producer but nobody is ready to accept as Maanav is unwilling to compromise on the script he has written. His girl friend Ruchi (Shahna Goswami), a successful film editor arranges for him to meet Nitin (Sushant Singh), a film producer. Nitin likes the script but is not very sure of its commercial prospects. Maanav then proposes to give him a story with sex at its base. Nitin seems convinced as he says “*I don’t mind . Sex is as sellable as a star. Bas vulgar nahi hona chaahiye (It should not be vulgar.)*”.

Nitin loves the story, but finds it too short for a feature film. Maanav then creates three more stories based on the same premise and the four stories are woven together mingling with the main narrative.

The first story is of an ordinary carpenter Kashi (Rajpal Yadav) and his beautiful and sensuously seductive wife Maya (Riya Sen). The name itself is very symbolic and in a context the husband himself says also “*Maya to hoti hi thagni hai.*” (The illusion is always deceptive.) Maya has been depicted very sensually – the camera moving on the whole body beautifully adorned by flowers, kohl lit eyes and the whole body language speaking of her desire. There is a song also in the back ground complementing and justifying Maya’s intense passion:

*“Mann bhi hai pighlaa pighlaa, Tan bhi sulagaa jaaye.
Kaisi lagi hai agni! Sajnaa tu hi bujhaaye”*

(The heart is already melting, the body too is burning,
What fire is this! Oh beloved! You only can quench.)

It is, however, later that we come to realize that who she actually craves for is not Kashi but another man. Very tactfully, she satisfies her husband also, packing delicious food for him when he goes out to work, seducing him also by massaging his whole body when he comes back home. Her statement *“Kaam ki thakaan to kaam se hi jati hai ji”* (The fatigue of work goes by the amorous activity only.) is again a reflection of her burning desire.

Kashi however, gets suspicious when warned by his friend that Maya is deceiving him. He wants to verify it and therefore plans a whole situation. And really an other man comes to his house with whom Maya is involved very intimately. Maya is just about to be caught red handed, going to have sexual relationship with the man she craves for. But there comes actually a very peculiar as well as funny situation when she realizes Kashi lying under her cot and then very tactfully and cleverly she uses her presence of mind to convince Kashi and defend her extra marital relationship. Although overtly it seems to be quite an unrealistic situation, yet the way she has been portrayed to befool Kashi referring to Savitri; the moral codes; the *Satyug* and *Tretayug*; the sacrifice of life and thus valorizing the sacrifice of character; is quite symbolic as well as expressive of the suppressed desires of a woman. Maya offers to give a damn to the preservation of ‘character’ saying *“Charitra jaaye bhaad mein”* (The character may go to hell) and so justifies her characterlessness also if it is for the sake of her husband’s life. She actually subverts the whole concept of *‘pativrataa’* (devoted to husband) and *‘sateetva’* (devotion to husband) using it for her own benefit and defence. The man (Arunoday Singh) also understanding the whole situation co-operates and becomes an active character in the whole drama. He says to Maya *“Charitra ka balidaan praano ke balidaan se bhi kahin adhik badhkar haiaao yajna shuru karein.”* (The sacrifice of character is much bigger than that of life....Let us begin the rituals.) The *‘yajna’* here refers to the sexual intercourse.

The story raises a number of questions. Is the sacrifice justified because here Kashi is shown to be a foolish person who is unable to understand Maya's *maya* (illusion)? Is it justified for the whole society because the main concern is here the life of the husband? Is it just a story to be laughed at towards the end as Nitin, Manav and Ruchi are shown to? Does it portray the cunningness of a wife for the sake of her own fulfillment and satisfaction?

The present analysis focuses simply on the bodily desires of a woman that she wishes to fulfill with a man of her own choice. The social norms and rules cannot allow her to go according to her choices and so she has no option except to be cunning and tactful. Maya is shown to be satisfying her husband's needs also very lovingly and if we are able to see her in the light of her own individuality, perhaps then only we can understand what she desires and needs for her own self and she moves ahead to achieve that in her own possible manner.

The second story is of a king Nirgun Singh (Prem Chopra) who marries fourth time at the age of seventy. And the girl he marries is the daughter of an inferior king. The marriage itself is a statement on the narrow outlook of patriarchy where a father lusting for 'power' ignores the wishes and desires of his own daughter. The queen Laavni (Konkana Sen) is desirous of sex but the king is neither interested nor capable of that due to his old age. There is a very symbolic conversation of the queen with her maid servant Kesar (Ila Arun):

“Queen : Agar baadal garje hi garje aur barse nahi to kya hoga ?

Kesar : Phool patta murjha jayega.

Queen : Mai murjhaana nahi chaahati.....in aankhon me tujhe kya dikhta hai ?

Kesar : Pyaas.”

(Queen : What will happen if the clouds thunder only it doesn't rain?

Kesar : The flowers and leaves will wither.

Queen : I don't want to wither away...What do you see in my eyes?

Kesar : Thirst.)

It is very significant to understand the undertone of the queen's words where she is expressing her desire to live a life of fulfillment. She desires to bloom. She

desires to get her sexual urges satisfied. And Kesar completely understands her emotional as well as physical state and helps her in all possible ways to go ahead and get her desires fulfilled even if it is from some other man. There is a loyal servant of the king, the *Senapati* (head of the army-Arunoday Singh). Kesar meets him and gives him the hint that the queen needs him for her fulfillment. The *Senapati* is loyal enough to refuse bluntly yet he gives it an afterthought and then agrees, but on certain specific conditions.

Even the conditions in this context can be interpreted to be the strictest possible tests of a woman's intelligence, cunningness and tactfulness as well as the means to make her crave more for her desires to be fulfilled. Laavni passes all the tests very successfully although the last one is quite a weird one. The man agrees to fulfill the queen's sexual urge but he wants to do everything in front of the king. Laavni is astonished at this condition yet she agrees to it. The husband here is again shown to be a fool, that again seems to be extremely unrealistic but even this story also is a reflection of the desires of a woman that, if not fulfilled, can take her to any extreme. The marriage of the king and the queen with such a significant gap in their ages is itself a statement on a man's lust for power that ultimately takes the neglected woman towards her own lust for love, sex and fulfillment.

Kesar's story and her status of being sexually deprived is another example of the identitylessness and unfulfillment of a woman with the man being responsible for it. She is quite agitated over her own situation but feels very helpless as her words reveal: "*Aadmi ki jaat hi aisi hove.....mhare wale ne dekho....haath pe naam khuda ke chala gaya...mhari to nath ainya ki ainya hi padi reh gayi.*" (The race of men is like that only...Look at my man...He got his name engraved on my hand and left...I am still a virgin.) Her own situation of helplessness and her help for the queen is a reflection also on the changing status of woman with the change in time. Women of her generation perhaps could not think or dare to go ahead to get their fulfillment but the generation of the queen is moving ahead to identify, express and also fulfill its own sexual desires. The queen can be taken as their representative who does not mind passing any test or fulfilling any condition provided it leads to her own satisfaction and contentment. And the following story shows that she fulfills tactfully not only all the conditions put on her but fulfills herself also with the sexual pleasure. She rather

enjoys all the conditions she has to complete, taking them as a challenge that she has the guts to fulfill.

The third story is of a man Manjul (Shreyas Talpade) whose wife Manjula (Riya Sen) loves him a lot and her sexual desires are more in comparison to those of her husband. She expresses them very openly to him. She waits for him very lovingly to come back from office, instantly hugs him as he enters home and confesses that she passionately likes the odour of his sweat. And that is why she doesn't allow him to even go to washroom lest he should wash himself and the odour that provokes her desires would go away. The husband is not able (with an ordinary patriarchal mindset) to understand and also digest the fact that a woman too can have so strong sexual desires. She honestly loves him and wishes to rely on him completely for her fulfillment. The husband consults a friend in that regard telling him: "*Chaubees ghante* (twenty four hours) *she needs sex.*" The friend warns him: "*Aurat triya charitra hoti hai, kuchh bharosa nahi.*" (The woman has got a mysterious character. One can't trust.)

And Manjul's suspicion on the wife increases. On the suggestion of one of his friends, Manjul decides to use his talent of mimicry to check his wife's loyalty towards him. In the second incident, while testing Manjula, he is identified by Manjula herself which leaves her feeling extremely hurt. One year later she meets a painter (Arunoday Singh) who requests her to pose as a model for his portraits. After a bit of reluctance, she says yes to that man and on being asked the reason of saying yes to him after a lot of reluctance, she narrates to him the whole story of her love and desires for her husband and then her feeling of being hurt as her husband doubted her even for loving him and specifically for being open and demanding for her sexual desires.

So Manjula decides to move ahead with the honesty of her own emotions and desires and crosses all the boundaries of loyalty to her husband to achieve her fulfillment in a relationship of her own choice, with a man who is not scared of her beauty and desires but rather understands and appreciates it both as an artist and as a man also. Initially she agrees to pose for the artist, only with the desire of searching for the lost colours in her life as she tells him : "*Maine socha chalo andar na sahi, baahar to rang dekhne ko milenge.*" (I thought I would be able to see colours outside

if not inside me.) Realising the love, care and desire in the eyes of that artist, she initiates to show her own desire to him and thereby gradually gets involved with him physically too.

In the last scene of the story, the husband, unexpectedly sees her in an intimate situation with her lover. But here also, she pays the husband back in the same coin. On being asked who she is with, she replies : “*Main to samjhi thee ye tum ho aur hum phir se vahi mazedaar khel khel rahe hain.*” (I thought it was you and we are playing again the same interesting game.) She refers to the mimicry episodes that were planned by Manjul to trap her but ultimately Manjul is trapped in his own game that she very wittingly calls “*mazedaar khel*” (interesting game).

Actually the whole film is a multi-layered one. Within the film, a film is being discussed. Several issues and portrayal of characters in the stories discussed come out of their ‘reel’ possibility and are discussed in ‘reality’ by the producer and his friends. With the story of Manjula, one more layer is opened where the ‘reel’ and the ‘real’ merge through the real story of Ruchi’s own life. She narrates her own story of being mistrusted, beaten up and sexually abused by her husband and says : “*Maine bhi Manjula ki tarah pehle use sabak sikhaaya hota aur phir divorce diya hota.*” (I wish even I would have divorced him after teaching him a lesson first.)

The character of Manjula is actually an instance where she has become a role model for women like Ruchi. The important thing to be noted here is that the focus is more on her love, honesty, loyalty and desire for her husband and then the same for the other man. But it is further more important to note that it is her husband’s lack of sensitivity and sensibility in understanding her desires, his lack of trust in her that her natural instincts push her to move beyond him and find her fulfillment in another man.

The fourth story is of a couple Hotu (Boman Irani) and Anita (Konkona Sen Sharma) who are shown to be a caring and loving couple in the beginning. But as the story progresses, we come to know that he often lies to his wife and goes for one night stands. In one situation, he talks to his taxi driver regarding a man’s need for women other than wife, and the driver very frankly and rather shamelessly says : “*Humne to shaadi hi nahi ki saab ji. Jab dukaan par doodh milta ho to gai baandhne ki kya zarurat.*” (I have not got married Sir. What is the need to tie a cow when the milk is

available on the shop.) This statement of the driver is an open insult of women on the one hand but on the other, it is a harsh reality also that actually boomerangs on all such men who forget that the women of their own families might be available on the same '*dukaan*' (shop), as we see later in the same story.

Hotu reaches a hotel, asks for a night guest and a woman in *burqa* (veil) is provided to him who, he doesn't know, is his own wife Anita. Initially it is he only who is shown to be shocked and trapped in the situation as the wife dominates and shouts over his disloyalty and cheating. It is however, later that we come to know that the wife too had come to the hotel as a professional night guest to fulfill the desires of such sex-seeking men and also to get her own desires fulfilled: of body as well as money.

There is a very significant scene in this situation when she goes to the bathroom, looks at herself in the mirror, puts something in her eyes to add to her drama of being hurt, but actually smiles to her mirror image calling it a "bitch". This is what actually men have called women whenever she violates the so called moral and ethical codes. But the present situation seems to subvert the whole concept of even 'abuses' fixed for her. A woman is shown to be identifying here with her real self and she is happy over her cunningness and tactfulness. She doesn't mind calling herself a 'bitch' as it is actually a statement of her victory over her own meek and submissive self leading to her own fulfillment and contentment.

The last scene is again a breaking of the layers of the film itself. All the 'reel' stories of befooling the husbands make Nitin realize his own 'real' life. In an extremely drunken state, he calls his wife liar, "*bloody whore*", and "*randi*" (prostitute). Very aggressively she asserts her right to her own pleasure that she avails due to her financial liberty but is slapped ferociously by Nitin and then with some more aggression, she retorts: "*And what do you call a man who whores around? Hain tum mardon ke paas itni gaaliyaan jo itni bhaddi hon! Hain?*" (Do you men have such abusive words that may sound so bad? Have you?)

Even here the patriarchal husband tries to violate the wife's right to her privacy and then proves himself to be generous enough to forgive her. The wife is not the meek, passive and submissive woman to beg for the forgiveness but rather a bold

and assertive one who possesses the strength to say “*Tum kaun hote ho mujhe maaf karne wale?*” (Who are you to forgive me?)

On the other hand, we can see Maanav and Ruchi intimately together where Maanav is sharing his dream with Ruchi where he saw the famous painter M.F.Hussain standing on a beach with harmonium and singing lines from Kabir : “*Kabira khadaa bazaar me mange sabki khair/ Na kahu se dosti na kahu se bair.*” (Kabira standing in the market prays for the welfare of all/ He is nobody’s friend, nobody’s foe.) These lines are a universal statement on the world being a ‘*bazaar*’ (market) and Hussain is there specifically to give his practical wisdom to all those who wish to live life on their own conditions, as he tells Maanav : “*Mazaa to tab hai jab rules bazaar ke hon aur khel tumhaara.*” (It would be a fun when you follow the rules of the market but the game is yours.) And this practical wisdom can be seen in all the aspects of this film, whether they are the women tactfully handling their desires or even Maanav who ultimately decides to make a film himself following this dictum. Ruchi’s question in the context is again significant as she asks Maanav: “*Film ke treatment me mirch honi chahiye. Batao batao kaise karoge?*” (There should be some chilly in the treatment of the film. Tell me, tell me, how would you do!) The instant reply of Maanav is: “*Gaana daal ke*” (By inserting a song). And the end expresses the status of the dancer, who is ultimately a woman, as ‘*mirch*’ (chilly). So the end talks about the need of ‘*mirch*’ for the film’s sellability.

From the beginning to the end, the film has talked about various issues of life, unfolding the layers of the ‘reel’ world to the ‘real’ world of the characters of the film itself and ultimately to reach one more world, that is, of the audience of ‘*Mirch*’. And to me, as an audience, the woman here has been treated as a *mirch*, on the one hand to provide spice to the film itself, if viewed from the professional and commercial angle; and on the other, to be a spice herself, for her own life, so that she may be able to see, live, realize and enjoy her own life to its full, specifically and importantly for her ownself. And lastly to prove her worth as ‘*mirch*’ to all those who must have thought of her as a simple submissive creature simply to be ‘used’ as ‘*mirch*’ to spice their lives up. The women in this film have shown that the same *mirch* that has always been used to provide spice (the pleasure) to all can prove to be more spicy, but for her own pleasure this time. So the identity of her ‘body’ used as an object of ‘sex’, on different planes, possesses the possibility of acquiring pleasure, for her own sake, and

providing perhaps pain to all who are not used to her liberal statements on life and specifically ‘her own life’. And the role that women have been given in this film justify that they are using the rules of the market and the ‘*khel*’ (game) is ultimately ‘theirs’: the whole ‘*khel*’ of acquiring and enjoying their own body for their own pleasure.

The next film for analysis is *Dhobi Ghat (Mumbai Diaries-2010)*, directed by Kiran Rao. It is a dynamic cinematic portrait of Mumbai, a film that considers the city itself as a character and looks closely at how it impacts people from a range of social classes. *Mumbai Diaries* takes us on a beautiful and loving tour of Mumbai, the city of contrasts, the city of hope to migrants everywhere who come for a better life, the city of culture to migrants who come for a glimpse into their heritage. One of the characters has very aptly summed up Mumbai as “(my) muse, (my) whore, (my) beloved” There is no overt plot – four lives randomly connect in Mumbai. There are fleeting moments of happiness and pain and the eventual realisation that the journey never ends. The struggle to survive and to connect is eternal.

The main characters are Arun, the painter (Aamir Khan), Shai, the NRI investment banker (Monica Dogra), Munna, the local “*dhobi*” (washerman) (Prateik Babbar) and Yasmin (Kriti Malhotra), Arun’s former housemate in the city. It actually feels like the director is reading their diaries out to us.

Arun, a reclusive artist, moves into a run-down flat in the older part of Mumbai. After attending an exhibition of his works, he meets Shai (Monica Dogra), an American banker who has come to Mumbai to devote time to her hobby, photography, and takes her back to his flat, where they get involved sexually. The next morning, Arun expresses his regret on having involved in sex in his drunken state and wishes to clarify that he is not a womanizer doing that usually. Shai, however, is happy over what happened but she goes away seeing the regretful mood of Arun as she herself is in no mood to regret the ‘lovely time’ she had the previous night.

Shortly after, Munna (Prateik Babbar), a *dhobi* who dreams about getting a break in Bollywood, arrives to deliver Arun's laundry. Arun moves into a new apartment the next day. While unpacking, he finds a small container that had been left by the previous tenant of the apartment. In it, he finds a silver chain, a ring, and three

video tapes (*Pehli Chitthi, Doosri Chitthi and Aakhri Chitthi*- First letter, Second letter, Third letter) by Yasmin. The tapes turn out to be the video diaries in which Yasmin communicates with her brother. In the tape, she is generally happy, and shows her apartment, which is the same one that Arun is occupying now. The next morning, Arun is informed by his manager that art dealers, impressed with his art, have decided to open a gallery in Sydney featuring his works. Arun is pleased by this, as it would also give him a chance to visit his ex-wife and child, settled in Australia. He begins to work on a new painting.

When Munna delivers laundry to Shai's house, they meet and soon become friends. Munna agrees to take Shai around Mumbai and help her gather photographs about the occupations of the poor. In return, Shai agrees to shoot a portfolio of Munna to help him get into the film industry. Arun continues watching Yasmin's tapes and learns more about her life, including that she has recently married a man who seems distant. Shai obtains Arun's new address from Munna. Shai's father's construction company is constructing a building opposite Arun's apartment. She starts shooting photos of Arun from the construction site without Arun being aware of it.

Munna continues struggling to find work in films. To earn a living, he washes clothes by day and kills rats by night. He disapproves of his brother's criminal activity but they are close, and Munna's brother uses his underworld contacts to try to get Munna a break in the industry. In the meantime, Munna shows Shai the different facets of Mumbai, including the *dhobi ghaat*, (the laundry) where he works as a launderer. Munna develops soft feelings for Shai but is unable to express them, mostly because of his working-class status. One day, Arun spots Shai nearby and invites her to his house. He apologizes about their first meeting. Munna sees them together and feels betrayed but Shai is able to convince him to keep helping her. One night, while Munna is at his rat-killing job, Shai sees him and takes pictures. Dismayed, Munna flees from her.

Arun watches the final video by Yasmin. Her tone has changed considerably since the previous tape, in which she revealed learning that her husband was in an extramarital affair. She strongly indicates that she intends to commit suicide. Shaken by the knowledge that Yasmin might have hanged herself in that very room, Arun flees the apartment and moves into a new one. Munna arrives home to find that his

brother has been killed. He and his family relocate to a new flat and Munna visits his brother's contact in the film industry to show him his portfolio.

Arun studies the painting he has been working on, which is now complete. Yasmin is prominently featured along with other things she had left behind. Shortly after, Shai finds Munna and Munna again tries to flee from her, but she catches up with him. She insists upon their friendship and asks about Arun's whereabouts. Still hurt, Munna lies to her and they exchange an abrupt farewell before Shai leaves. Moments later, Munna changes his mind and runs after Shai's car, weaving through the traffic. The film ends when Munna catches up to the car and gives Shai Arun's new address.

There are no heroes or villains in the film -- just human beings with their dreams, hopes and frailties. It simply projects the many faces of the city and its residents. And among those, the present focus will be on the character of Shai as that is relevant for the present study. But before we move ahead to focus on her as a woman, it is important to understand her name 'Shai' that can be taken as an example of 'pun' if compared with its homophone 'Shy'. It can be taken as an example of "homophonic pun", that "uses word pairs which sound alike (homophones) but are not synonymous" as illustrated in Wikipedia. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pun>]

Since Shai and Shy sound alike, what is audible to us as audience in the context of film's audio is only the word 'shy'. It could be spelled differently and that it is spelled "Shai" is something we discover only towards the end of the film in the 'casting details'. Now since the spoken sound matters to take us to the meaning and 'Shai' also is not a common name, let us mention her as 'Shy' that can be taken as the first audio impression received by the audience. This is important to understand her whole attitude and personality as a woman, 'Shy' is a value loaded term and has important socio-cultural connotations also, so far as a woman is concerned. But before we go into those connotations, it is necessary to see its literal meanings.

The Macmillan Dictionary defines 'Shy' as:

- Nervous and embarrassed in the company of other people, especially people who you don't know.

- Not willing to do or be involved in something because it makes you feel nervous or embarrassed.

[\[http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/shy\]](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/shy)

The Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary defines it as:

- (Of People) Nervous or embarrassed about meeting and speaking to other people.

[\[http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/shy_1\]](http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/shy_1)

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as:

- Timid
- Circumspect
- Reserved
- Secluded [\[http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shy;\]](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shy;)

Now coming to the socio-cultural connotations and explanations of ‘shyness’ as an attribute, Wikipedia tells us that the views vary with culture: “Shyness is one of the emotions that may serve as behavior regulators of social relationships in collective cultures. For example, social shyness is evaluated more positively in a collective society, but negatively in an individualistic society.”

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shyness\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shyness)

Shyness is often linked to either genetics or pathology. The sociologist Susie Scott challenging such interpretations and explanations mentions ‘shyness’ as “a socially oriented state of mind that is socially produced and managed”. [as cited in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shyness>]. Cain in her article “Shyness: Evolutionary Tactics” tells that in earlier generations, such as 1950s, society perceived shyness as a more socially attractive trait, especially in women. [as cited in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shyness>] The children of closed communities are already “less expressive and less assertive in social situations” as Wikipedia says. [\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shyness\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shyness). And seen in the context of the “obedience and conformity, selflessness and self-denial (that) are still the ideals of womanhood” [Kakar,2007;52] shyness can certainly be taken as a positive trait that puts women behind in the name of a virtue required for an ideal woman. It thereby puts an end to

the scope of all and any openness in the attitude of a woman that can cause any threat to the conservative patriarchal society. Otherwise a woman who is not shy always possesses the possibility of being outspoken, frank and candid and then she may not follow the ideals of a society trapped in its own strict socio-moral and cultural codes.

The girl Shai in this film is completely against her very 'name'. Neither is she nervous or embarrassed in others' company, nor is she reserved or timid as we can observe easily when she goes to a party hosted in Arun's honour. She can be seen enjoying the party, meeting people, having drinks with friends. She meets Arun there for the first time but being simply bold and frank, she gets talking to him and they share talks on their professions, preferences and priorities in life. On being asked by Arun how come she was there in Mumbai, she replies: *"I guess I needed a break from things.....a new perspective, some fresh air to my head."* So studying *"Investment Chances of Asian Economies in New York"*, she is presently in Mumbai on a sabbatical for a change as well as to shoot the bylanes and explore other possibilities of the city for her photography passion. Her keenness to 'break' from the things is significant to understand her whole personality: to understand her as a woman who is liberal and open to changes upto the extent of 'breaking' the stereotypes as we are able to see later in some of the situations of the film.

Getting familiar with Arun, she goes with him to his house. They both drink, see some photos together, dance together on the music and ultimately make love. In none of her activities is visible the 'shyness' of her name. Neither being in party, nor talking to Arun, nor going with him and then making love to a man she hardly knows except for a few hours at the party. It doesn't seem important how much she knows a man. What seems to be more important is how does she feel with him and if she feels comfortable and loved, she doesn't mind making love also quite willingly. We see in the morning that she gets up and is quite normal in her behavior with no hangovers at all. On the contrary, Arun is shown to be quite disturbed. He prepares tea for her and they sit but Arun is quiet. Shai is perturbed to see this and the following conversation takes place between the two that is significant enough to put before us the whole attitude of Shai as a woman open and free about her sexuality:

"Shy : I'd a lovely time last night.

(Arun doesn't speak.)

Shy : Are you hung over?

Arun: No.

Shy : Hey, Is there something wrong?

*Arun: No, actually Shy, I am really.....(pause)I am very sorry about
last night. I mean I was so drunk and had no idea about....*

*Shy : Hey, What are you sorry about? Don't be sorry. I'd really great
time."*

(So Shai seems to be happy about what happened between Arun and him the previous night, that is, the physical or rather the sexual intimacy between the two where as Arun is severely perturbed at what he did. He was drunk and he feels that he must have hurt Shai by doing that. And as he explains further about himself, it can be seen that he perhaps didn't want that to happen. Moreover, he doesn't do this usually and is regretting the moment. Shai, however, doesn't appear to be in any mood of regret. Her consistent efforts to make Arun feel easy about that moment of love making go all in vain as Arun repeatedly says sorry and gives explanations as if to defend himself and show his regret, thereby seeking forgiveness from Shai.)

*"Arun: No, I am quite a loner. I keep to myself and I don't usually do
this, you know.*

*Shai: Hey, It's cool. I am glad you usually don't do this. I mean, hey,
I don't either."*

(As a woman, she is shown to be remarkably bold about her sexuality who not only has sex with Arun, but is also comfortable and cool about it. She even happily accepts the 'loveliness' of the 'moment' and doesn't hesitate to share that she also does not do it 'usually'. But then this confession makes explicit her doing it occasionally. That is a significant acceptance on her part to be aware of her sexuality, her desires and their fulfillment.)

*"Arun: No, actually what I am trying to say Shai is that I am not a
relationship kind at all, you know and I am really sorry if I led
you into believing that this was something more, something
more....."*

(Arun is not able to complete the sentence and Shai does that for him)

Shai: More than just a shy.”

It is very important to understand the possible ambiguity of the word ‘Shai/Shy’ here. For Arun, the act of love making seems to be an act of ‘shy’, that is, nothing more than a ‘shameful act’ that has caused him a lot of ‘embarrassment’ and regret. His behaviour during the above mentioned conversation also shows him all the time feeling shame over what he has done. Nowhere is he shown to be happy or feeling good about the moment. What prevails over his visible and understandable state of mind is only and only embarrassment that gets verified by one of his later statements in the film. Shai chooses to go back instead of staying with Arun then who is feeling too much guilty and says sorry so repeatedly that Shai is unable to understand his state of mind. She only says: *“I don’t know what is going on in your head.”*, picks up her things and leaves saying: *“Arun, you know what.....it’s cool. Take care and see you.”*

Shy goes away offended, not because Arun had got physically and sexually so close to her but, actually at his narrow attitude towards sex, at his guilt over having sex, at his repeated sorry over having done so. Despite her initiating confession of having a lovely time with him, Arun is not able to understand and respect her womanly feelings. Shai is not feeling any guilt at all on having sex with him but rather wishes to treasure those moments which were not the ‘guilty’ moments for her but rather those that establish her right on her own body and the pleasures associated with it.

Arun sees Shai after a long gap and invites her for coffee. She accepts the offer and starts talking to Arun about what is going on in their respective lives then. But Arun again comes to ‘that night’ showing his regret to seek forgiveness from her. Shai literally joins her hands requesting him not to start all that again: *“Oh no! not more apologies, just forget about it, okay, please. It’s really not a big deal, really.”* Shai’s words and her coming again to have coffee with Arun express clearly that whatever happened between them that night is *“not a big deal”* at all for which Arun may have so much *“apologies”*. She even makes him realize that had she felt really bad about that, she would not have been with him *“for a while”* sipping coffee. This situation proves Shai to be a liberal woman who is not ready to think twice about her sexual indulgements as she had got involved in it with her own will. Shai perhaps

wishes to celebrate her moment of pleasure and fulfillment while Arun is repeatedly regretting the same. Even Arun is not wrong for his 'sorry' as he feels bad for what he did in his drunken state. His feeling of embarrassment is evident when he says: "*When I get drunk, I do these random things, it gets so embarrassing...*" But it still makes Shai feel bad because she doesn't want Arun to feel so sorry for the moment that she liked, as has been mentioned earlier when she calls it "*a lovely time*".

There is one more situation that reveals to us the open attitude of Shai. She is with one of her male friends sitting in a car actually watching Arun from a distance and when the friend asks the reason of her interest in Arun, she talks of "*something being left unfinished*". And the friend very frankly says: "*Couple of positions you haven't tried yet.*" She just smiles looking at him but no anger or irritation is visible. This again puts Shai before us as a woman who is open, and uninhibited about sex and is bothered more about what she 'feels like' doing instead of what she 'should' do as a woman.

The whole conversation that goes on between Arun and Shai reveals to us the socio-ethical codes of morality in our society that sometimes make us feel so trapped that we just forget to think about our pleasure and moreover, simply stop to desire too. Shai, however, can be seen as the representative of all those women who are free from such traps and live life following not the codes prescribed but rather keep themselves open to all the windows that might provide them fresh air of fulfillment as well as the satisfaction of living a life on their own terms, free of all prescriptions.

Dev D (2009) directed by Anurag Kashyap is the next film for analysis. It is a reflection of the sensibilities, conflicts, aggression and independence of present generation (lovers). Free thought, exuberance, and recklessness of the youth of today is something that the film has projected very realistically. It has shown couples to behave like 'real people' in the contemporary internet age who engage in phone whisperings of a salacious kind, chat uninhibited on sex and send uncloaked pictures as attachments.

Devendra Singh Dhillon, i.e. Dev D (Abhay Deol), the protagonist of the film is the son of a rich industrialist from Punjab. He is brash, arrogant, ill-mannered, demanding, lusty, impulsive and also self destructive as we see in the movie later.

Dev's father realizes that his son is getting spoiled day by day and decides to send him to London for higher studies. Dev and Paro (Mahi Gill) are childhood sweethearts. Paro is shown to be a rustic Punjabi girl, who handles family and farms, household and its men with the same élan. Paro is a free spirit riding high on life with nothing but an indestructible faith in her love for Dev. She is from a small family that has been close to Dev's family since childhood. She always had love for Dev but Dev, being an insecure narcissist, [as Paro makes him realize in a later scene in the film : *"Tum kisi se bhi pyaar nahi kar sakte sivaaye khud ke."* (You can love nobody but yourself.) And referring to a mirror in his bathroom says *"Tumhe na is sheeshe se shaadi kar leni chahiye"* (You should marry this mirror.)] nudges Paro over frivolous things, thereby not acknowledging her affection and care. While separated by distance, Paro and Dev's youthful love blossoms more. Dev arrives in Chandigarh to attend his brother's wedding and meets Paro. And there are some scenes showing their endeavour to make love. The seeds of suspicion are sown however, which the couple are never able to weed out for a lifetime. Dev hears rumours about Paro and her sexual advances towards other men. Unaware of the fact that these rumours are by a man who is jealous of Paro's love for him, he immediately believes them and ditches Paro. What makes them fall apart is mutual suspicion and an essentially male vision of how a woman should conduct herself sexually, although just before this incident, we are shown Dev's indulgence in another smart girl who is there at the wedding. On being insulted by Dev, Paro refers to that alliance and turns her back on him, deciding to marry whosoever her parents choose.

In our society, marriage is not "a relationship between two individuals but an alliance between two families or more, between two clans. The choice of partner then, is not individual but arranged by the family." [Kakar and Kakar, 2007:60] But in case of Paro, it is not the decision of society or family that she marries the man of her parents' choice. It is rather her own decision. She was very clear about her relationship with Dev until the moment of her rejection. She was rather blunt regarding her decision to marry Dev and had announced to her parents that she would not marry anybody other than him. Her father being a manager to Dev's father was low in status and he felt hesitation and was even afraid of humiliation if he asked for Dev's hand for Paro. He tells Paro that a marriage proposal has come for her from a rich man from Delhi. Paro, however, is bothered only about her wish and wants her

father to talk to Dev's father. But the situations take a turn and she is not ready to beg or grovel when Dev throws her off. Out of sheer frustration resulting from his own narrow minded attitude, he humiliates her for her low status and also her untidy looks: "*Vaise bhi teri aukaat nahi hai hamaare ghar me shaadi karne ki. Manager ki beti hamesha manager ki beti rahegi. Ja ke shakl dekh aaine me. Bikhare hue baal, kaapde pehenane ka dhang nahi. Shaadi karegi mujhse!*" (Otherwise also, you don't deserve to get married in my house. A manager's daughter will always remain a manager's daughter. Go and see your face in the mirror, disheveled hair, no sense of wearing clothes. Aspire to marry me!) For a moment, this humiliation hurts her but she doesn't allow it to overpower her anymore. Instead of going back to Dev with her plea of love, she rather chooses to move on in life proving her determinism to lead a life of her own choice where even her pre-marital sexual relations with Dev don't make her either weak or guilty. She accepts to marry an older man with children. Paro, therefore picks up the threads of her life and moves on with a lot of grit and dignity. On her wedding day, Dev realizes that the rumors were false. But his ego doesn't let him accept his mistake, and he lets her marry someone else.

Then enters in the film Leni (Kalki Koechlin), a Delhi student of half-European descent. A date with her much older boyfriend lands Leni in an MMS scandal and her whole life is shattered. Her father commits suicide as he feels humiliated by his daughter's reputation and more guilt ridden on watching that MMS himself. It is important to observe here that he does not realise his fault of watching the MMS of his own daughter until Leni herself shouts in resistance on it. She dares to call her father a "*hypocrite*" asking him "*how could you (he) watch it !*" This is a common phenomenon to happen in our society that a majority of population takes pleasure in watching such scenes, downloading them from internet for themselves but the irony is that the same woman becomes the victim of the so called ethics and morality standards. Leni also is no exception. In her case, the power and fear of social forces goes to its extreme and she is disowned by her family. The father is already dead and her mother refusing to take any responsibility sends her to her father's house in the village. Leni is humiliated there and made fun of repeatedly by the family members. She wants her mother to take her back but the mother doesn't even pick up her phone calls. Refusing to live a life of shame and ridicule, she runs away from her father's village where her mother had sent her to face only more humiliation. She

comes back to Delhi and as a runaway, she finds shelter with Chunni, (Dibyendu Bhattacharya) a pimp. With great determination and inner strength, she adopts an alter ego - Chanda. As Chanda, she becomes a high profile escort by night while Leni remains a college student by day. Chanda plays a fantasy girl. She is a different character every day and she finds some dignity and independence in her new way of living. So Leni/Chanda lives life on her own terms. One night a customer is brought to her room in half-conscious state — it turns out to be Dev.

Dev, tormented by Paro's wedding, has been seeking refuge in alcohol and drugs. He finds some solace with Chanda but is unable to forget Paro. Once after he calls Paro's husband in the middle of the night, she visits him at the cheap lodge where he is staying. She shows her love by taking care of him, tidying up his room, cleaning up the things, washing his dirty clothes but spurns his attempts at physical intimacy. A sexually rejected Dev indulges in further self-pity and substance abuse, kills seven in a hit-and-run, does not reach home before the death of his father, wastes himself and his family's money and ends up, literally, on the road, narrowly escaping death by a drunk driver. He realizes life could be short; he already was on the lesson learning experience since some time, with all past memories of both Paro and Chanda. Dev starts looking out for Chanda again and meets her. In the meantime, Chanda had found a ring which Dev had actually secured long back for Paro but thinking that Dev would have brought it for her, Chanda wears it and tells him about it. Dev also decides to settle with Chanda and they live happily thereafter.

Besides other female characters, the specific focus of my study is Paro with all her frankness and candour. Her fiery and spunky presence in the film differentiates her from the delicate, virginal heroines of the earlier era. She is a heart-stopping, blatantly alive real woman who is looking for love with sex and is quite open to express it. Paro and Dev are chatting on internet where Paro's name is Chamak Chhallo and Dev's is the Dude:

“Chamak Chhallo : I'm growing bigger day by day.

The dude : How big?

Chamak Chhallo : Big enough for you.”

(Paro's mention of her growing up in age can easily be interpreted as a reference to her growing desire for sex where her body has become 'big' enough to receive Dev as

a sexual partner and the type of conversation that takes place clearly establishes a woman's bold and open attitude towards her body and sexuality.)

*“Chamak Challo : Mummy keh rahi thi shaadi kar le warna koi uthake
le jayega*

Dude : Tu mana kar de.

*Chamak Challo : Mai toh kehne wali thi Dev se pehle kisi ko haath
nahin lagaane doongi.”*

(Chamak Challo : Mother was saying that I should get married,
otherwise somebody would kidnap me.

Dude : You refuse then.

Chamak Challo : I was about to say that I will not allow anybody to
touch me before Dev.)

The sexual desire oozing out in the conversation between Paro and Dev separated by distance depicts the love defined by care and affection that not only acknowledges but also expresses the importance of the aspect of sexuality in it. Paro has been shown as not only a bold beloved but a daring daughter also, who can talk so openly to her mother about her desire and its respective fulfillment.

There is one more scene where Dev and Paro are talking over phone in a taxi of London:

“Dev : Paro mai paagal ho gaya hun.

Paro : Mai bhi paagal ho rahi hun. Jaldi aao.

Dev : Tu ho rahi hai, Mai ho gaya hun.

Paro : Mai bhi ho gayi hun.

Dev : Abhi toh kaha ho rahi hai.

*Paro : Thodi der pehle ho rahi thi, Abhi puri tarah se paagal ho gayi
hun.*

Dev : Paro, Do you....do you touch yourself?

Paro : (sighs)...”

(Dev : Paro, I've gone mad.

Paro : Even I am going mad. Come soon.

Dev : You are getting. I am already.

Paro : Even I am.

Dev : You just said you are getting.

Paro : I was getting mad a while ago. Now I have gone completely mad.

Dev : Paro, Do you touch yourself?

Paro : (sighs)...

Both have been shown to enjoy the talk of sex to its full and are very desperate to meet each other. The repeated reference to the word “*paagal*” (mad) very powerfully expresses their physical urge that has put them on the verge of madness.

The whole conversation between them depicts the ways through which they can satisfy their sexual desire without physically meeting together. Other than this sound conversation, Paro’s body language and postures correspond with feeling of fulfilment of sexual desire by listening to Dev’s voice. The close up shot of her toes bending together displays her restlessness to meet Dev. The next shot of her face with mobile phone suggests she is lying down on bed while talking to Dev which is being shown without keeping her full body in frame.

Their passionate desire for each other in all its openness gets confirmed in the following conversation also:

“Dev : Ek photo bhej na.

Paro : Hai toh tumhare paas.

Dev : Bina kapodon wali.

Paro : Paagal ho gaya hai.”

(Dev : Send me a photo.

Paro : You have got one.

Dev : The one without clothes.

Paro : Have you gone mad?)

Dev is frank enough to ask for her nude photograph and Paro besides calling him *paagal* for his demand actually clicks it for herself and takes all the pain to get it scanned at the market. She shares with Dev the embarrassment or rather the

harassment she had to face due to that photograph and asks him not to dare put any such demand in future. She is not worried or embarrassed about what she has done but pained at the mindset of society that totally disapproves of such things.

There is another situation also where the scenes and dialogue are completely different from the earlier Indian cinema, where a girl would surrender to her male counterpart and would easily follow his advances. In this scene, it's Paro who is equally participating in love making act and guiding her lover regarding what to do and what not to do. Paro snatches the fag of Dev and drags him. In the very next shot, they are shown making love in the backyard of home exchanging these words:

“Paro : Haath nahi jayega.

Dev : Jayega.

Paro : Kurti tight hai.

Dev : Faad dun.

Paro : Sabke saamne aise hi jaungi ?

Dev : Haath chhod mera.

Paro : Nahi chhodti, jatti haan.

Dev : Mai bhi ta jatt haan.”

(Paro : The hand will not go.

Dev : It will go.

Paro : The shirt is tight.

Dev : Should I tear it ?

Paro : Will I go like that in front of everybody ?

Dev : Leave my hand.

Paro : I will not. I am a Jatti.

Dev : So I too am a jatt.)

The situation is an example of quite an open and blatant acceptance of a woman's desire, her open mention to the parts of her body the man might want to touch and also her uninhibitive refusal to allow the man to do that according to her immediate situation. There is another character named Rasika (with a minor role) in the film, who is sister of the person Paro is married to. Her reference is important so far as the representation of women's sexuality is concerned. Rasika advances to Dev and she wants to have him before anyone else takes of her share. To achieve her

goal, she gives Dev an alibi to take her away from the crowd where they can be alone. She asks Dev about his girl friend and explicitly asks if he has got involved in sex with her :

“Rasika : Do you have a girl friend?”

Dev : Ya.

Rasika : Have you guys done it?”

Dev : Done what?”

Rasika : S-E-X”

The conversation shows Rasika’s liberated behaviour towards sex. She has no inhibitions in her mind regarding discussions on sexual matters with a man and moreover, with a man she has very recently met. These have been areas where Hindi cinema had always shied away. More than this, in a later scene, she is shown hooking her bra (which is a hint to the sexual act she was involved in with Dev). when Paro comes there. Rasika stands in front of a mirror hooking her bra and her face reveals an expression of fulfillment. Paro’s sudden entry to the room doesn’t make her feel any more nervous. Without feeling any shame or guilt, she rather is shown to be bold enough to ask Paro not to tell about this to her brother. It can be said that the film represents every woman as simply a woman with all her womanly desires including that of sex.

There is one more charmingly unapologetic depiction of female sexuality when Paro drags a mattress on the bicycle to the field just for love making. Paro makes bed in sugarcane field. Dev reaches there on her call and is suddenly pounced on by Paro. She has arranged this all just to fulfill the demand of Dev who, in the midst of marriage ceremonies had asked to “*do something*”. Paro sits over him and starts making love. Dev is a bit reluctant due to the rumours he has recently heard about Paro (a man named Sunil tells some lies about Paro’s sexuality and her relationship with other men. Sunil does this just out of jealousy as he claims to love Paro) and doesn’t show any interest in love making. Paro takes all the initiative and despite Dev’s reluctance, puts off his T Shirt forcefully. On seeing his chest, she doesn’t even hesitate to say “*Tere bade baal hain.*” (You have got quite dense hair.) Dev ultimately pushes her away forcefully, out of his anger and jealousy. Although nothing more is visible in the frame of the camera except sometimes the upper body

of Paro, yet the ferocity of a woman's desire and her action to achieve that has been explained successfully to the audience. Paro has been portrayed quite realistically as a simple woman full of sexual urge, desperate to have sex with the man she loves. She has been shown to be completely open and uninhibitive about sexuality and all its descriptions and expressions including those of her own body as well as Dev's.

Paro coming to meet Dev after her marriage is a lady who knows she is married but would not mind visiting her childhood lover. The love in her is still alive but the body is hers and it is upto her to allow Dev to use it or not. And she resists Dev's sexual move to her. She comes and does all the work at his home but regarding body, she is in control more of hers than Dev's. Moreover, she suggests Dev to give up drinking and tells him that she is going back to her home (her husband's one). He should forget her and go back to his village to take care of his father's already established business. Out of sheer frustration and the pain of getting his ego hurt at the blunt refusal of Paro for having sex with him, he uses very coarse language but Paro also doesn't hesitate to reply bluntly and quite openly:

*“Paro : Mai ghar jaa rahi hun. Mujhe bhool ja aur tu bhi pind wich
apna kamm sambhaal.*

Dev : Ghar jaake tu apna buddha sambhaal le.

Paro : Boodhe umr me honge, bistar me nahi.

*Dev: Phir yahan kya kar rahi hai! Chadhi rehti apne superman buddhe
ke upar.*

Paro : Unke saath to upar chadhne ki naubat hi nahi aati.

Dev : Mera mazaak uda rahi hai?

Paro : Nahi, tumhaari aukaat yaad dila rahi hun.”

*(Paro : I am going home. Forget me and take hold of your business at
your village.*

Dev : You go home and take hold of your old man.

Paro : He is old in age only, not in bed.

*Dev : Then what are you doing here! You should have been on the top
of your old superman.*

Paro : With him, I don't even need to be on the top.

Dev : Are you making fun of me?

Paro : No. I am just reminding you of your status.)

Paro has thus the audacity to speak openly even about the sexual energies of her husband and her statement shows the level of her sexual satisfaction also that has kept her happy with an old aged husband who despite age, takes care of her and fulfills her womanly urges.

The film can be called remarkable for its characters that have been treated as human beings rather than classifying their feelings according to their gender. The lead female characters are relatively liberated. They know about their desires and the actions they take for fulfillment of those desires. They are bold, educated and capable of accentuating their desires to a man and also to prevent any unwanted advances. *Dev D* gives a new powerful representation of women in Indian cinema that is not a subordinate of any male member but an owner who owns her desire and her position in society.

Turning 30 (2011), directed by the debutante director Alankrita Shrivastava is the next film for my analysis. This film has focussed on a working woman living in a metropolis: how dejected she feels when a relationship fails, her perils, the hardships and how she eventually rediscovers herself on her 31st birthday. Besides all this, beginning with the song “*Ladki you turning 30, I’m sexy crazy flirty*”, *Turning 30* is remarkable in its depiction of women quite boldly talking about their sexuality, discussing longeries that are sometimes used “*to trick men to bed*”, confessing lesbian identity publically and openly asking and replying questions on sex. The film begins with a song where three women are in a bath tub, partying, smoking, drinking together and seem to enjoy life to its full. The lines of the song are quite significant to understand the present generation women who are not at all hesitant in announcing their personalities, their choices, their priorities, their approvals and their disapprovals. They just wish to live life on their own terms and don’t mind even getting ‘down and dirty’ if it is for the sake of themselves :

“Humari jawani deewani (Our youth is crazy)

Boys go honey honey

And they pay the money money yeah, hey

Yeh kudiyan nahi aasani (These girls are not simple)

Lines teri funny funny
Style tera nahi chahiye, hey (Your style is not needed)
Tell me, tell me you want to marry me
Lekin nahi tu mera lover boy (But you are not my lover boy)
Follow me, follow me but don't touch me
You just be my toy, be my toy
Boy let's get down and dirty
Ladki(girl) you turning 30
I'm sexy crazy flirty.”

The story begins with a background voice of the protagonist Naina (Gul Panag) who speaks about Mumbai as a city of struggles as well as fulfillments “*a city where every young woman can live the quintessential free independent life*”: a life every woman actually aspires for. *Turning 30* is the story of Naina who is about to celebrate her thirtieth birthday and life is a perfect picture with a good job and the perfect guy: “*Brick by brick I built my life here and now with two weeks to go for my 30th birthday, I finally feel I was right.*” Naina is going steady with her boy friend Rishabh (Sid Makkar) and is about to get married to him when suddenly things turn into a nightmare as Rishabh breaks up with her to marry a girl who he considers to be a better match for him simply because she can finance his father’s failing business. Naina has some setbacks at work also when the credit for all her ideas and hardwork in the advertising agency she is working for, goes to undeserving people. She is even fired on a flimsy ground. With few days left for her birthday she is in a mess, “*jobless and manless*” as she herself says. She is frustrated, confused, unhappy and doesn’t know what to do with her life. At one point, she even confronts Rishabh and his parents, pleading with them not to leave her in the lurch and hurling abuses at them for having cheated her.

There enters in her life Jai (Purab Kohli), a friend with whom Naina had had a relationship before Rishabh walked into her life. Jai and Naina had been in bed together many times but when Naina wanted him to marry her, he developed cold feet and walked out on her. It is later in the film that we come to know the exact reasons as why he had left Naina then. He confesses he was neither financially secure nor mature enough then at the age of 26 and was quite “*afraid of commitments*”.

He enters her life again on her 30th birthday. As days go by, Naina and Jai get close to one another. However, Naina is unable to forget Rishabh whom she loves madly. Now, Jai wants to marry Naina but she isn't sure. Consequently, Jai leaves her. Then suddenly, Naina's friend Malini (Tillotama Shome) discovers the hidden writer in her. Malini and another friend Ruksana (Jeneva Talwar) encourage Naina to give writing a novel a shot. There's also a willing publisher, David (Anjum Rajab Ali) and after a bit of reluctance Naina ultimately agrees to write and her book gets published. Meanwhile, Naina had filed a case of cheating and harassment against her company for having flicked her ad campaign and she wins that case also. She is offered a bigger post in the same office but she finally decides to get settled as a writer. Rishabh comes to say sorry and wants her back but by now she has sorted out her life, and coming out of all confusions, she decides to settle down with, not Rishabh, but Jai.

Turning 30 is actually a woman-centric film and, what's more, it deals with the problems of a woman who does not fit into the stereotype – she is single, lives alone in the city, smokes, drinks, uses four-letter words and has sex with her boyfriends. The unabashed references to the protagonist's sex life and physicality are relatively new to Hindi cinema. Naina is a real woman who feels hurt when ditched by her boy friend and is shown to cry bitterly at this betrayal but then the same Naina is also bold and frank enough also to ask Rishabh if the other woman he is going to marry is “*better in bed*”. Rishabh comes to her house to collect his things and there Naina is the woman who doesn't hesitate to ask again some probing questions about his sexual relationship with his prospective wife. Naina is the woman who despite knowing the reality of her relationship with Rishabh and his decision to marry someone else wants to assert her sexual right on him and approaches him with a desire to make love, which, however, is turned down upon by Rishabh.

Naina comes to know about the ongoing affair of Sahil (her friend Ruksana's husband) with some other woman and it makes her reflect and rather question the institute of marriage in our society:

“Is marriage so fragile a relationship? Then why do we covet it so much? Sahil or Rishabh, the story is the same....May be real women like us need real men and that's a rare species.”

Her reality of betrayal at both the workplace and personal life makes her reflect more on the gap between the dream, the illusion and the reality that actually turns out to be so harsh as to startle her out of her fantasies. Her voice is quite representative when she says:

“Everyone grows up with fairy tales imagining magic wands and happy endings.....I guess it’s time to stop believing in fairy tales.”

And so she decides to think about her life afresh although it is not very easy for her. We can see that Naina has been portrayed with a disarming mix of transparency and confusion. She lets the character's strength and vulnerability hang out in the same line of vision, creating a world that is at once lived-in and unexplored and that perhaps the real life of a woman is. The friends throw a surprise party for her birthday just to keep her spirits up and Jai is deliberately invited there by Ruksana. The party is a significant event to put light on the uninhibitive and open attitude of women of the present generation who openly reply personal questions without much ado. This is where Malini (one other close friend of Naina) confesses her *“lesbian”* identity. And the situation has been handled quite realistically by the director where all are awestruck on this bold revelation by Malini but then get normal on being initiated by one of them to cheer up for her honesty. The friends are open enough to ask Naina : *“Who is better in bed? Rishabh or Jai? and if there would others, who’s been the best?”* And Naina does reply although after a bit of embarrassment : *“Of all the guys I’ve been with including Rishabh, he (Jai) has been the best.”* Afterwards the kissing video of Naina and Jai is shown to be enjoyed by all. These are some of the situations that have been portrayed in the film with quite ease and candour and they reflect the changing attitudes and life styles of people who seem to be trying to come out of the trap of taboos so far as the body and their pleasure associated with it is concerned.

With Jai, Naina goes to Rishabh’s engagement party. She gets badly drunk, calls Rishabh and desires to meet Yamini (Ira Dubey), his fiancée, not because she is willing just to see and know her, but to vent her frustration and anger out. She says to Yamini *“Rishabh is quite a pain in the ass, literally.”* This is quite a bold, a bit indecent but truly an unconventional situation where Naina not only vents herself out

but also tries to expose Rishabh's sexual relationship with her in front of his fiancée, that too, not bothering her own status and honour.

Going around with Jai, Naina is not sure of marrying him because firstly Rishabh is still "*irresistible*" for her and secondly she can't trust Jai not to leave her again, as she doesn't consider him serious about his relationship with her. Naina aptly represents a girl nearing or crossing 30 years of her age who is constantly pressurized by the society and family to get settled in life. Her mother doesn't miss any chance to visit matrimonial sites looking out for good matches for her or taking her to astrologers and reminds her to be serious about marriage prospects : "*Shaadi ke bare me serious to hona hi padega na.*"(You will have to be serious about marriage.) Her friend Ruksana tries to convince her with the logic of getting married and having babies in time, as the "*biological clock is ticking away*". Not only this, a lady meets her in the washroom and tries to make her realize that turning thirty is a matter of "*tension*", reminds her of her "*sagging breasts*" and even suggests her to get herself registered on a "*matrimonial site*".

But Naina is determined to go her own way. Her reply to her mother regarding marriage is "*I'll think about it when I am ready*" and bluntly tells Ruksana that she would not marry Jai "*just because she is (I am) thirty plus and scared of test tube babies.*" Gradually she comes to know that Jai is very serious about her. He apologizes for what he had done to her four years ago and tries to explain the reason why he did that. Naina is shown to be less bothered about that past but still is unable to say yes to Jai who has now proposed to her and is very clear and firm on his decision. The famous columnist Nangia has very rightly pointed out that despite India being "known at one time for leading sexual innovation worldwide and celebrating the erotic through murals, sculptures and the *Kamasutra*, many Indian generations have been brought up to consider the most natural expression of love- the physical- to be sinful outside marriage." Moreover, the "sin is all on girl's side....the dubious honour of her family is inextricably linked to the girl's intact hymen. The idea of a girl initiating or enjoying sex is still considered taboo." [Nangia: 2013]

Naina, maintaining a sexual relationship with Jai feels herself free from all such taboos. She shows her complete right on herself, her body, her time, her decisions and her life, and therefore tells Jai: "*Just because I slept with you doesn't*

mean I want to marry you.” She is already stressed, confused and disturbed due to her depressing and disappointing situations around. So she wants to take her “*time*” to arrive at any decision without allowing the social traditions, customs or taboos to dominate her life.

At her workplace, she works very hard on the idea of “*Post 30 Club for Women*”, meets people, takes interviews and opinions and chalks everything out. The campaign is a representative one to “*celebrate womanhood*”. It proposes to make a Post 30 Club taking women from different walks of life, different aspirations, different concerns and different dreams but with just one thing in common that they are all “*ready to rediscover life*”. Naina’s own life experiences help her frame this campaign very realistically and she comes out with a significant and viable reason to ‘*celebrate*’ women. The lines she prepares to justify her project of the celebration of womanhood are:

“She loves, she cries and she is ready to dream again. She hasn’t lost the spark in her eyes. She is ready to start afresh, ready to take her chances.”

Naina makes a great presentation but all her sincere efforts are rejected, not because they are not good and deserving but simply because of the “*manipulative games*” of her male colleagues. This situation also projects before us the very common and prevalent mindset of society where a woman, her efforts, her ideas are not respected, be it any field of life. Naina, however, is bold enough to call her male colleagues “*spineless bastards*” and leaves the job herself without waiting for any more humiliation. But she doesn’t go back like a submissive docile woman who would only cry at her misfortune. She moves ahead as an active and aware woman being conscious of all her rights and files a case of harassment and malpractice against her colleagues. She has to struggle a lot to gather all the documents for evidence but she doesn’t lose heart. Meanwhile her friend Malini discovers her writing talent and takes her to David who runs a publishing house. David is ready to publish but Naina has been shown reluctant or rather hesitant and indecisive. She has been portrayed simply like any other ordinary woman of our society who might behave in the same manner under the given situations. She is not sure about going for that but her friend Ruksana encourages her : “*People die to get their book published.*

Aisa chance roz roz nahi aata.” (Such a chance doesn’t come daily.) Jai has already refused to be her “sex toy” any more. He wants her to “confront” herself and decide about his marriage proposal as he can’t keep “waiting this issue” and tells her clearly: “I can’t do this anymore. Call me when you sort your life out.” The publication opportunity in such situations gives her a chance of sorting herself out and she decides to take this chance. Her legal “crusade” can interfere in her book project and she is suggested by Ruksana to leave that and concentrate only on the publication. But at the same time, her another friend Malini comes ahead to sort out her conflicts and encourages her to go for both. She feels that besides “writing”, “it is also important to get her due” and Naina continues her struggle at both the fronts and comes out successful. She wins the case filed against her colleagues and her book titled “Turning 30” is launched on her thirty first birthday.

That day happens to be a remarkable day of her life as she herself says : “*With the launch of my book, I think I have finally come to terms with turning thirty.*” The pages she reads from her book at the launching ceremony present a real and vivid picture of a woman who has “broken heart” but also “a few nights of drunken rivalry” and “many nights of tear stained pillows” to come out of her despairs. She looks for newer ways and solutions to a broken heart, that is, “other men” or even as simple as “a hair cut”. She believes “we see only what we choose to see”. She generalizes the reality of all women irrespective of age: “*Thirty or not, we are all looking for happiness but perhaps in wrong places*”. And without saying anything explicitly, she seems to suggest to all women to look for their happiness at the right places. Her own situation comes out as an example of this choice. Her despairs and confusions; failures and frustrations, and then the daring decision to file the case and determination to complete the book and finally the decision to marry Jai are enough to put before us the heart-warming journey of a young woman blossoming into a woman of substance.

To Rishabh who comes forward to her seeking forgiveness and begging for another chance to be given to him, she simply says: “*The past is over Rishabh...It’s time for new beginnings.*” She has decided her ‘new beginning’ with Jai. Coming out of a lot of terrible conflicts and confusions, she is able to sort out her life rediscovering herself and her potentials and moves beyond all barriers and

boundations. The film concludes very significantly with the optimistic voice of the protagonist in the background while Naina is shown walking hand in hand with Jai and they move on with loving togetherness:

“After rain comes sun shine, just as winter always turns to spring. But the spring blossom depends on how well we are able to use the winter. I guess I had learnt to brave the winter and it was finally time to great spring.”

The next film for analysis for the present chapter is ***Jab Tak Hai Jaan (2012)***, directed by Yash Chopra. It is a love story of Samar Anand (Shahrukh Khan) and as fate puts it, he comes across two women who love him equally. Major Samar Anand, stationed with the Bomb Defusing Squad of the Indian Army is a man who flirts with death at every step of his life. He has successfully cut short the lives of ninety-seven bombs and is on his ninety-eighth one when the film begins.

Akira Rai (Anushka Sharma) is a twenty-one year old intern and is dying to get placed with the Discovery Channel. The girl dives headlong into the freezing cold waters of a crystal-blue lake with Major Anand sitting on the banks. She passes out in the water and a nonchalant Samar saves her, makes her wear his jacket and then rides off. Once in the room, Samar Anand’s diary falls off from one of the pockets of his jacket. Akira reads it and is transported back in time into the life of a twenty-five year old Samar.

The diary recounts Samar's earlier years as a struggling immigrant in London, working as a street musician and doing other menial jobs to support himself and his roommate. Samar is working part-time as a waiter when he meets Meera (Katrina Kaif) at her engagement party to her fiancée Roger (Jay Conroy). Meera grew up, motherless, in an affluent central London Christian Indian family; her mother left for another man when she was twelve. The dominant person in her life is her father, for whose company she works. Samar notices that Meera often prays as she entrusts all her faith in Jesus. Fate, however, has other plans for them and by a complicated turn of events it happens that Meera starts taking music lessons in Punjabi from Samar in exchange for English lessons that she gives him as he wants to be proficient in speaking English. Gradually they fall in love with each other. To make her face her

past, Samar takes Meera to visit her estranged mother and they reconcile. The same day Meera is supposed to confess her relationship with Samar to her father but Samar meets with a serious accident on his motorbike. Meera prays to God for saving his life, promising never to see him again. Samar recovers, and Meera admits her vow to him. Angrily, he leaves not only her but London also. Samar challenges God to keep him alive while he risks his life every day, because he believes his death is the only way to make Meera lose her faith in the deity who stole his love. He goes to India and joins the army, becoming a bomb-disposal expert.

When Akira finishes reading the diary, she obtains permission to make a documentary about a bomb-disposal squad with special focus on the personality of Major Samar Anand who, according to her is "*The Man Who Cannot Die*". She asks Samar for help, and becomes acquainted with him and his team. Akira begins having romantic feelings for Samar. But he, however, does not reciprocate because of his unresolved love for Meera. Akira makes a successful documentary film, and leaves for London. Her work gets all the praise but then her boss puts a condition that the physical presence of Samar is must there if she wishes the acceptance of her film at the Discovery Channel. She wants Samar to visit the city to help her publicise the film and more importantly to get herself a good break at the Channel. After a bit of his reluctance to come to London, he finally agrees. Akira is too happy to see him there but the situations again take a strange turn. He is struck by a car in his attempt to actually save the frenzied Akira (on his arrival in London) from being hit by another car.

Samar is diagnosed with retrograde amnesia, and he remembers only the events before his first accident a decade ago. Concerned, Akira tracks Meera down and persuades her to aid in Samar's recovery. Meera agrees, pretending to be Samar's wife. In the meantime, Akira realizes that Major Samar is only a fragment of the young Samar. He used to be happy and sociable, but is now bitter and lonely. One day Samar finds a bomb planted in the London Underground and helps defuse it. The event jogs his memory, and he realizes that Meera was lying to him. Samar confronts Meera with a choice: to be with him, or see him keep risking his life until he is dead. He then leaves for Kashmir, where he continues defusing bombs. During a conversation with Akira, Meera realizes that her beliefs and prayers subjected Samar to a fate worse than death. Realizing her mistake, she goes to Kashmir and they

reunite. Samar defuses his last bomb, proposing to her on the spot and the film ends there.

In this film, the focus would be on three female characters who are women of different natures, living in different situations. They face life with all its hardship and happiness as well. Just like the real women in life, these reel women are shown to make compromises in life, sometimes in their roles of being a wife, or a daughter etc. Sometimes they have to curb themselves for the sake of family and society but the director has left the scope for them to feel that they are just their real selves willing to live for themselves only, unbothered of all social norms.

Firstly it is the character of Meera who is overtly shown to be very soft and quiet woman believing in the existence of Jesus Christ and often visits church for sharing with God each and every happening in her life. She is the only daughter of her father living with him only since the age of twelve, when her mother left them for some other man as she is told by her father. The way she is told the reason of her mother leaving home makes her develop negative feelings for her mother and she starts hating her for not bothering even her as her daughter. It is later in the film that we come to meet her mother and know and understand her real situation. Meera loves her father a lot and respects him and all his decisions that he takes for her including even her marriage with a man of his choice. It is not that she does not like that man. The only thing is that she is not able to feel love for Roger – her fiancé. On the day of her engagement with Roger, she happens to meet Samar (who had seen her earlier also while she was going to church and had fallen for her that very moment). They exchange some talks and separate. Then she gets frequent chances to see Samar performing as a street singer. One day Meera offers him some money for teaching her Punjabi song that she wishes to learn and offer as a surprise on her father's birthday. Samar agrees without any payment in exchange of English speaking lessons from Meera. And they start meeting frequently afterwards.

One day while in her music class with Samar, Meera sings the song she has learnt from him but she does that very hesitatingly. Feeling a bit shy, she is not able to be free and open while singing. Samar wants to make her realize that she needs to come out of all her hesitations and feel free if she wants to sing perfectly. In sheer frustration, Meera throws off guitar and pat comes the response of Samar who wants to make her realize her real self : *“Ye hi wali. Ab hui na tum free.”* (This one indeed.

So now are you free.) He further tries to make her accept her real self as a woman, as an individual:

“Miss Meera Thapar, jo ladki tum sharafat mein banti ho wo tum ho nahi. Tum to vo ho jo chhip chhip kar cigarette peeti hai. (She is shown to smoke secretly in an earlier scene where she had met Samar for the first time on her day of engagement) aur ye what the fu.. what the fu.. gaaliyan deti hai .”

(Miss Meera Thapar, You are not the simple woman what you pose to be. You are the one who smokes cigarette secretly and abuses what the fu..what the fu...)

Embarrassingly Meera is not ready to accept that she is that kind of girl which Samar is talking about. Samar makes a plan to take her to a night club. He calls his friend Maria to tell her that he will bring some woman to her who is a “*little shy type*” and asks Maria to make her “*little sexy*” like Maria herself. Meera is convinced further by Samar: “*Vahan tumhe koi nahi pehchanega. To sirf ek raat ke liye apne dil ki suno.*” (Nobody will recognize you there. So just for one night, listen to your heart.) Meera is hesitant to go there and ask him why he is doing that to her and Samar’s reply in the situation is “*Kyun ki mein tumhe dikhaana chaahata hoon ki tum kaun ho.*”(Because I want to show you who you are.)

Meera here seems to be representative of all those women who curb their real self and don’t accept it just for the fear of society who may label them as ‘bad’ in that case. As a daughter, she gets the training in “how to be a good woman” [Kakar,2007:52] and the prescribed ideals of womanhood are “obedience and conformity, selflessness and self-denial” [Kakar,2007:52] . There are clear cut distinctions about the good woman and the bad one where “a good woman does not ‘create waves’ or ‘rock the boat’.” [Kakar,2007:52].

Like a ‘good woman’, Meera goes to that youth party, watches the open attitude of people over there, feels a bit uncomfortable in the beginning but gradually gets so engrossed in the whole atmosphere that she also starts dancing. She astonishes the people around by dancing passionately, freely and openly. She feels uninhibited and unbothered there as the surroundings provide her an opportunity to be free of all

her prescribed and bound roles that she has to follow in the family and society thereby keeping her 'goodness' intact .

Interestingly, she changes her name also when Samar meets her. Samar introduces himself to her as Raj and then she too introduces herself as Teena. This change of name is quite symbolic and significant to understand the gap between the real and the posed self of a woman. The new name Teena represents Meera as her 'real self' who is free, liberal, unbridled and unrestrained in contrast to Meera who is only a 'good' woman following all the prescribed and "culturally designated feminine roles". [Kakar,2007:52].

She starts feeling love for Samar but as an ideal daughter, she has to fulfill the wishes of her father who she loves and respects to the extent of denying her own love. She gets a parcel from her mother who sends her own wedding saree for Meera with a letter, expressing her feeling of love and affection for her daughter. Meera is overwhelmed to see the saree and feels like meeting her mother who she has hated till now. She feels confused and Samar again helps her to identify her real self and take the decision accordingly. He only reminds her of her another self 'Teena' : "*Meera to nahi janti par Teena janti hai use kya karna ha.*" (Meera doesn't know but Teena knows what she has to do.) And Meera's meeting with her real self 'Teena' takes her out of all confusions and she decides to meet her mother.

This self 'Teena' is very important to understand not only Meera but actually every other woman in our society who leads her life following only the water-tight social norms of fulfilling her duties in different roles. 'Teena' provides the space that every woman requires 'to be herself', to live for herself, to assert her right on her own self and gather her pleasures that are otherwise lost in the name of 'ideal' womanhood.

In the same context, the other character that is important is Meera's mother. Meera goes with Samar to meet her. Even the mother is not expecting Meera to visit her. Meera meets her very hesitatingly. The mother is shown to come forward feeling a pleasant surprise on seeing her daughter and showers kisses on her and hugs her very lovingly as she has met her after so many years. But Meera's confusion of feelings is visible in the manner she holds her mother when the mother hugs her. The mother and the daughter sit together. Mother shows Meera all birthday gifts she had

bought for her every birthday but kept them back with herself as she had promised Meera's father never to meet Meera. Meera is overwhelmed to see her mother's love for her. She is further told how her mother got married to her father, lived with him although peacefully but with no feelings of love for him. Her mother's words put before us the training that is consciously or unconsciously given to daughters in our society:

“Mai unnees saal ki hi thi jab tere papa India se mujhe byaah kar laye the. Tab tak yahi seekha thaa ki ladki pita ke ghar se pati ke ghar jaati hai toh vohi uski zindagi hoti hai.”

(I was nineteen years old when your father had married me and brought me from India. Till then I had learnt only this that when a woman goes from the house of her father to that of her husband, that is her life in all.)

Kakar has very rightly pointed out the social training of a daughter: “the primary goal of her life is to please her future husband and parents-in-law.” [2007:52] Like any other wife, her mother also got adjusted with her husband. She doesn't complain against him but only says that she could never feel love for him : *“Tere papa bhi bahut achchhe the par main kabhi unse pyar na kar saki.”* (Your father too was very good but I could never love him.) She further tells Meera that she hadn't even realized this feeling of lack of love since she remained busy in rearing Meera up, again just like any other mother who forgets her own self in her mother's role.

Meera is told that she was four years old when a man named Imran came in her mother's life and she fell in love. That was for the first time in her life when she had realised the love of a man and had infact, felt it also. But she restrained herself for the sake of Meera and could do it for eight more years. Then perhaps her real self craving for love overpowered her and she tells Meera that she could not adjust any more when Meera got twelve: *“Mai khud se haar gayee aur Imran ke saath chal padi.”* (I lost to myself and went away with Imran.) It is important to understand that what she feels like 'losing' was actually her 'gain'. She feels lost and it is the social training that makes a woman feel so, because losing herself, she actually deviates from the defined ideas of being a wife or a mother etc. And the mother here loses her control only on the 'socially desired' self and actually gains the 'individually desired'

self: her true self where she is an individual first: a woman seeking her own pleasures in life, in spite of putting them at stake in her differently desired roles.

One of the mother's statement in this situation is significant to understand the awakening that dawns upon her as an individual: "*Mai ye jaan gayee thi jo khud khush na ho vo auron ko khushi kabhi nahi de sakta.*" (I had realized that one who is not happy himself/herself can never give happiness to others.) A woman usually tries to live life following the 'prescribed' roles only, without actually feeling and even realizing her own pleasures. These words of the mother convey very clearly that a woman needs to be happy first and then only she can be expected to give happiness to others.

Meera is told that Imran was ready to live with her mother without any ritualistic marriage. He was also happy to respect her wish of not having any other child than Meera. All of Meera's doubts on her mother become clear when she meets her, realizes the truth of her situation, understand it and sees her mother happy with the man who she loved. Even the time duration of eight years that her mother took for herself trying to bridle her emotions for the sake of 'family' are important to understand the impact of the "conscious inculcation of culturally designated feminine roles." [Kakar,2007:52] And then the realization by the daughter of her mother's happiness as a person is further important for the portrayal of respect of woman's choices and chances that she desires to take for her own self.

Meera had hated her mother because she had been told the 'social version' of the distinction between a 'good' and a 'bad' woman. Her mother was designated 'bad' because she had 'left the family' for the sake of her own pleasure that is her love for Imran. But Meera realizes at last that her mother did not do anything wrong as she says ; "*Ek baarah saal ki ladki ye samjh nahi paati lekin ek ikkees saal ki ladki ye jaanti hai ki aapne jo kiya , bilkul sahi kiya.*" (A twelve year old girl cannot understand but a twenty one year old girl knows that what you have done is absolutely right.)

Seen in the perspective of women's status, the mother's as well as daughter's role in this film finds a new dimension. Despite being a mother and a wife, a woman can choose to go for her feelings and desires as an individual. And the daughter too can understand and respect her mother's decision, simply as a woman.

The mother moves further to achieve her love but Meera can't remain Teena all the time. She has to be still there in her social role of a 'good' daughter. Her mother's life and decision actually make her realize her own right on her happiness and she decides to tell her father about her love for Samar, and her decision to marry him and not Roger. But situations take a twist and Samar meets an accident. Blindly believing in Zesus, Meera is suddenly reminded of her 'promise' to Zesus that actually she had broken.

Following her 'good daughter' role, she had made a promise in the church that she would never "*cross the line*". The line here refers to the line of control, actually marked by society, where a girl cannot indulge in any kind of physical relationship with any man, before marriage. But after meeting her mother and realizing her right on her own life, she had dared to confess her hitherto unconfessed love to Samar and in her words had "*crossed the line*" also, as she had got physically intimate to him. Seen from the social point of view, the accident of Samar and Meera's faith in God and her belief that she has got the punishment of "*crossing the line*", are all again kinds of reminders to portray before us the realistic situations of life where any violation on the part of a woman is bound to be punished. In Meera's case, it is the 'religion' that has been shown as a dictating authority punishing her for her 'violation', in the form of the accident of Samar: a man she loves too much.

The director has tried to portray the position of women very realistically: sometimes confused, sometimes restrained, sometimes unbridled and sometimes punished. But still he has tried to explore all the possibilities that a woman can take for her own self despite all strict socio-cultural rules and regulations.

And last but not the least is the character of Akira who, from the very beginning is shown to be a girl of free spirits: a woman who lives her life considering 'herself' important first of all. She thinks and decides for herself first and then come the rest of the roles she is expected to fulfill. A trainee documentary film maker with Discovery Channel, she has been shown in the very first scene of the film, as an adventurous young woman who dives into the ice cold water just in order to shoot herself and show that to her colleagues as an evidence of not only her daring but also her film-making skills. It is there that she happens to meet Major Samar Anand who actually saves her from drowning in that chilled lake when she realized that she was

going to get frozen. Her first encounter with a stranger who saves her life is a revelation of her carefree personality. Instead of thanking him softly for saving her life, she rather expresses her anger saying: "*Mai mar jati to! Thoda pehle nahi aa sakte the!*" (What if I had died! Couldn't you come a bit earlier!) The man remains quiet, however, and giving her some hot drink, rides back on his motor bike.

Akira reaches the place where she was staying then and there comes a phone call. It is from one of her boyfriends she is no more interested in, as we can understand from her behaviour in that situation. Seeing the caller's name on the phone screen, she receives the call irritatingly and says: "*Arjun... It's over between us yaar. Stop calling me.* (She speaks angrily loud). *Chheh maheene ka relationship thaa, itne hyper kyun ho rahe ho!*" (Why are you getting so hyper! It was only a six month relationship.) The boy perhaps says he loves her and wants to remain in the relationship. But her reply is "*Are, tum pyaar karte ho. Mai ab nahi karti. Simple! Chal get over it.*" (Oh! You love me. Now I don't. Come on, get over it.) And she disconnects the phone saying that she would talk to him later. Her casual attitude towards a love- relationship is expressive of her as a young woman who goes for boy friends when she feels the need and can leave them also any time without getting emotionally tied.

She is about to put off Samar's jacket (that he had given to her to protect her from cold) when a diary falls off its pocket. She happens to read that diary and then comes to know about the heart-rendering love story of Samar and Meera. She has been shown as a practical and ambitious girl who is passionate about her pursuits in life and overtly seems to be a hard core girl as she herself submits when she meets Samar. But Samar's love story makes her cry and that puts before us her implicit feminine self also.

She meets Samar to give his jacket back and talks about his love-story and asks him if that is his real story, as her attitude does not allow her to believe in the seriousness of love relationships. For her, love seems to be an after-thought only and the primary thing is 'sex'. Moreover, she considers herself a girl not believing in lasting relationships but rather in instant ones to begin as well as to end up soon. She tells Samar:

“Yaar, tum na mujhe jaanate nahi. Badi hardcore ladki hoon mai. Kabhi roti woti nahi. Tumhaari love story ne full senti kar diya yaar. Dekho, Main na ikkees saal ki hun. Aaj ki instant make out, instant breakup generation ki ladki hoon. Pehle sex hota hai, phir sochte hain, love hai ki nahi.”

(You don't know me dear. I am a hard core girl. I never cry. Your love story has, however, made me sentimental. Look, I am twenty one years old. A girl of today's instant makeout, instant breakup generation. Sex happens first and then we think whether love is there or not.)

She wants to make a documentary on Major Samar Anand and his bomb defusing projects. Taking permission, she comes there and meets his team, introduces herself and asks the team to remain informal with her and call her only Akira rather than any *“Madam, Shadam.”* Quite unhesitatingly, she tells them about her stay with them: *“Do hafton ke liye, zyaada bolne, zyaada khaane aur bahut zyaada gaali dene ke liye mai abhi se maafi maangti hun”* (I seek forgiveness in advance for speaking much, eating much and abusing too much, for two weeks.)

Contrary to the culturally approved and established feminine roles (as quoted by Kakar earlier), she is neither docile, no where hesitant, not at all shy. Living beyond all taboos, she doesn't hesitate to mention her 'instant' make out and break up relationships and her sexual indulgence in the same. Not only this, she is frank to confess her future plans also that include her desire to have 'sex' with people speaking different accents. She is shown shooting Samar diffusing a bomb hanging under a bridge when she herself is hanging there in order to shoot the scene. Samar asks her if she is not feeling scared. She tells that she is not scared at all and that she does not want to die so early. She is ambitious enough to live up to all the expectations that she has from her life, very importantly, for her own self:

“Mera itni jaldi marne ka koi plan nahi hai. Abhi to bahut saari documentaries banaani hain, duniya ki har ek country ko dekhna hai, alag alag accent ke bando ke saath sex karna hai.”

(I don't have any plan to die so soon. I have yet to make a number of documentaries, to see every country of the world, to have sex with persons having different accents.)

On being asked by Samar “*Tum Kamsutra padh kar badi hui ho! Ye sab soojhta hai!*” (Have you grown up reading Kamasutra! Think of all this!), her reply is: “*Soldier, Meri age mein na yahi sab soojhta hai.*” (In my age, this is what is thought about.) After completing her documentary, she has to go back and comes to bid farewell to the whole team of Major Samar. The farewell scene is remarkable as that presents before us Akira's daredevil personality who doesn't even hesitate to ask Samar to kiss her when he is about to give her farewell hug: “*Ye doston waali jhappi nahi chaahiye. Kiss karnaa hai to kar.*” (I don't need this friendly hug. Do kiss me if you can.) He comes forward and kisses her on forehead and she is blunt enough to say again: “*Ye kiss thaa.... tu ruk. Vaapas aake tere ko sikhaati hun asli kiss kaise karte hain*” (Was it a kiss! Just wait. I'll come back and show you how to kiss really.)

So Akira stands before us as a young girl representative of the present generation. She is ambitious and adventurous; bold and determined to live life to its full.

The song picturised on her perfects the picture of a woman who is free of all bonds and norms, moves ahead in life freely with a passion and loves her own self primarily, celebrating every moment of her life for her own self. She enjoys and celebrates the voice of the heart which makes her live every moment to its full:

*“Chali re, chali re, junoon ko liye
Katra, katra, lamhon ko diye
Pinjare se uda dil ka shikra
Khudi se maine ishq kiya re
Jiya jiya re jiya re jiya jiya re jiya re....”*

(I go I go, With a passion.
Giving every bit to the moments
The bird of heart flies from the cage
I have loved myself
The heart lived, the heart lived...)

The last film for analysis in this chapter is *Fire* (1996), directed by Deepa Mehta. It is that one film of Deepa Mehta's trilogy that was initially released in the west and other parts of the world. When it made entry into India, it was cleared by censor board for commercial screening, without any cuts. However, there was another unusual but significant turn of demanding only a change of names: 'Sita' – the younger sister in law was to be named Nita. A few days after its opening across the country, there were numerous accounts of attacks by Shiv Sainiks and after a lot of protests and controversy, Bal Thakery himself publically announced that he would accept the film provided it is released with the names of both the female protagonists Radha and Sita/Nita to be changed to Shabana and Saira. As a consequence, the public protest increased condemning Shiv Saina action. There was a great furore. Ultimately, it was cleared without any more changes. And the screening at the theatres started again that was a significant achievement in itself.

Mary E. John and Tejaswani Niranjana (1999) write in this context: "Should we not go beyond identifying good and bad images of women to investigate a critique of patriarchy that a film like *Fire* provides, and a characterization of the feminist self that it makes available?" [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4407727>] They further argued that a critique of such films is necessary to advance our understanding of questions of feminism and sexuality today. *Fire* represents patriarchy as being founded on the denial of female sexuality.

Regarding the names, Mehta had deliberately selected the names of her protagonists. The names Radha and Sita in society and hence forth in cinema are invoked to connote wifely chastity and subordination. They refer to a spectrum of archetypes of ideal femininity in Indian culture. Both names invoke numerous cultural values inscribed and prescribed in ancient texts and scriptures: all that is pure, chaste and self sacrificing about Indian wives. Sita, in particular, is used to represent the "perfect woman, the perfect wife, acquiescing unquestioningly to her husband's rejection of her." [Vasudev:98 as cited in Moorti, www.genders.org/g32/g32_moorti.html] More importantly, the presence of these names reveals the weight of tradition that continues to shape every day woman's lives. The way Deepa Mehta has projected one of the protagonists named Sita is quite significant as it completely demythicizes the iconic character of Sita. This actually became the reason for getting the name

changed to 'Nita' before the final release of the film after initial withdrawals due to fierce protests.

The objectification of women in cinema or any form of media is routinely overlooked but the depiction of women making choices, and that too, the choice of homosexual relationship, is deemed unacceptable. And this mainly became the cause of all the furore created around 'Fire'.

Fire is about the thematics of love as a relation of mutuality which is in conflict with the compulsion of the institution of arranged marriage. Set in contemporary New Delhi, its protagonist Radha (Shabana Azmi) is married to Ashok. (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) The film begins with a significant symbolic scene of the childhood of Radha. It is a mustard field: very beautiful and sensuous and romantic. Radha is sitting with her parents and the mother narrates a folk tale of the people of a town who used to remain sad because they had never seen the 'sea'. And an old woman consoled them saying: "*Mat ho udaas. Jo dikh nahi sakta wo bhi hai dikhta. Bas bina aankhen khole mann ki aankhon se dekho.*" (Don't be sad. Even that is visible which can't be seen. Only see with the eyes of the heart without opening your eyes.) The old woman in the story asks the people to rely on their inner voice, to listen to their heart and they will be able to feel the joy of seeing everything via their hopeful heart. And the mother asks Radha: "*Samjhi ?*" (Understood?) Out of her innocence, Radha replies: "*Nahi*" (No). But the significance of this 'sea' is something that Radha is able to understand later in her life. She often dreams of this situation and the advice of her mother whenever she is distressed. And the power of acquiring everything via the power of desiring eyes able to see everything that the heart desires, comes to her rescue. Her mother in fact, acts as an agent who tries to help her find romance in life, find positivity in every negativity around her. And this dream keeps recurring as a motif in her consciousness till she finds solace in her companionship with Nita.

When the story begins, the childless couple Radha and Ashok has been married for over fifteen years. Radha runs the family catering business, being helped by her husband according to his convenience. She is the primary care taker of her paralytic mother-in-law who cannot even speak and keeps with her a bell to ring at the times of her needs. She often bells when something happens against her wish. So the

'bell' also stands as a significant voice of a hapless woman who can show her resistance via ringing it. Ashok is often seen to talk about the importance of children in life and as well as the stigma of Radha's infertility. She epitomizes the 'traditional' Indian woman: duty bound and subsuming her individuality to the needs of the family. For Ashok, his spiritual guru ji is more important who he attends regularly. Ashok practices celibacy and the irony of Radha's marriage is that she is asked to share bed with him, not because he cares for her sexual desires and needs, but rather for testing his own capacity for sexual restraint. Once Radha asks him if he behaves like that just because she is barren and his reply is "*Pata nahi*" (I don't know.) He is bothered only about his search for the "great truth", irrespective of Radha's needs and desires. She asks one day: "*Aur is se kya paaungi main?*" (And what will I get out of it?) and the reply is a common patriarchal one: "*Meri patni ho tum. Meri madad karke apna kartavya paalan karogi. Aur kya!*" (You are my wife. Helping me you would just fulfill your duty. What else!) Asking her husband what she would get for herself thus helping her husband testing his capacity for sexual restraint, Radha actually hints at her own sexual needs and desires but her husband's reply makes her realize only her inferior status as a wife, who is supposed to fulfill her duties by helping the husband according to his wishes only, thereby ignoring her own wishes.

Into this unhappy family enters Nita (Nandita Das), the new bride of Ashok's younger brother Jatin (Javed Jaffrey). It becomes very clear early in the film, in the very second scene at Taj Mahal, where Jatin goes with Nita for their 'loveless' honeymoon, that Jatin is not at all interested in Nita as a wife. He has tied the knot with Nita only to appease his elder brother Ashok and biji, his mother. Immediately after coming back from honeymoon, Jatin's meeting with his Chinese girl friend Julie (Alice Poon) makes it more clear that although he has agreed to the arranged marriage with Nita, he is still in love with Julie and leaves Nita to negotiate her position within the joint family set up. The character of Julie is no less significant regarding the choices that a woman can take up in her life. Being a Chinese, she actually reverses the role of a woman in Indian society, where women in general have little say in most of the matters even today. She loves Jatin but is not ready to be bound in any relationship of commitment, like marriage. When Jatin expresses his desire to marry her, she says:

“Silly boy! *Jante ho word shikar ke meaning! Mera favourite word hai peechha karna, daudna, jhapatna, yahi hai khel. Jatin jaise hi hum paa lete hai , khel ka maza hi chala jaata hai.*”

(Silly boy! Do you know the meaning of the word hunting! It’s my favourite word....following, running, grabbing, this is game. Jatin, the pleasure of the game goes as soon as we achieve.)

So for her, life is just a game to be enjoyed and played over and over again and perhaps for her, Jatin is simply a “*shikaar*” (victim) who she wants to chase according to her convenience and pleasure, irrespective of what Jatin wants.

Nita from the beginning is shown to be quite frank and open. She doesn’t hesitate to ask her husband if he doesn’t like her, if he is busy somewhere else (with his girl friend) .She is the antithesis of Radha. In an interview, Mehta herself has described her as “modern India, desiring independence over tradition.” [Sidhwa,77,as cited in Moorti,2www.genders.org/g32/g32_moorti.html]

Soon after her arrival in her new house after marriage, Nita is shown to be changing into men’s trousers, lighting up a cigarette, putting on dance music, and dancing to it. She even kisses her sister-in-law Radha at an early moment in the film. In a later scene also, she dances with her wearing men’s clothes. The *biji*, is shown to be enjoying their dance in the beginning, but towards the end of the dance, we, as audience are able to see only the reactions on her face as the other situation is not in focus of the camera. The look of irritation and disgust on her face is actually her reaction towards the scene of intimacy (unrevealed to the audience although) between Radha and Nita. The servant Mundu’s words are enough to express the common disapproval of the uninhibited behavior of the two women: “*Lo ji, bijli gir rahi hai*” (Look! There is a thunderbolt.)

By the time, Radha and Nita get closer, as they both feel lonely with Ashok touching the feet of his *guru ji* and Jatin kissing the feet of Julie (a very remarkable juxtaposition of the scenes in the film). Both wish to see the “*samandar*” (sea): a significant symbol of the fulfillment in life they are seeking and craving for. And as a consequence, they get not only emotionally close but physically and sexually close as well. The result is their daring refusals to help their husbands in bed. They often come

out of their bed rooms at night and meet at terrace, searching for the “*khuli hawaa*” (open air) in their life.

There are interesting and significant episodes of *Ramleela* and *Karva Chauth* that depict not only the cultural stereotypes but also portray their subversion via the characters of Radha and Nita. The compulsive celebration of *Karva Chauth* to honour the husbands has been included in the film, obviously, to critique traditionalism which always dishonours and subjugates the woman. When Nita as a new daughter-in-law is supposed to observe this fast for Jatin, she asks about it. Radha even offers her a choice not to observe it if she is not willing. But Nita says she will have to do that only because otherwise Biji and her own mother would get angry. Yet her angst at her helplessness is significant enough to express the victimization of women in the name of culture and rituals:

“Dil chaahe na chaahe, kya kya karnaa padtaa hai! Sachchi, Kaisi hairaani ki baat hai! Sab rivaazon se hum kaise bandhe hain. Kyun hum majboor hain aise? Lagtaa hai jaise hum reet rivaazon ki kathputli hain.”

(We have to do a lot irrespective of what we wish to do by heart. Truly, it is very surprising! How we are tied to all these customs! Why we are so helpless like this? It seems as if we are just the puppets in the hands of customs and rituals.)

Jatin is least bothered about her observing fast for him and even bluntly asks her not to do anything at least for his sake. Yet she observes it, and while Radha narrates to her the story of *Karva Chauth*, she questions the decisions of the king in the story and talks about the possibilities of choices available to the queen in the story. The queen is representative of any other woman in the society. Towards the end of the story, Radha tries to convince her that women observe this fast to prove that they are the true ‘*pativrataas*’ (devoted to husband). But Nita is not ready to accept the situation of the queen who could not dare to leave the king who had ditched her: “*Kaisi aurat thee....mera matlab hai raani*” (What kind of woman was the queen!) And she discards the king altogether saying: “*Vo toh jaise gadha thaa*” (He was just a donkey). She then asks Radha to comment on the situation of the queen and Radha hesitatingly says “*Kya kahun! Kuchh thaa uske paas raasta?*” (What to say! Had she

got any other option?) and Nita is prompt enough to express herself: “*Ab itna bhi kya kartavya nibhaana! Raaste to ban jaate hain.*” (How much dutiful we need to be! Somehow one finds the ways.)

And the audience are able to see that Radha really ‘makes her way’ when towards the closing of the fast, she offers Nita a glass of water to sip from her hands. In North Indian culture, *Karva Chauth* is an important fast supposed to be observed by all married women and the fast is complete when after seeing the moon at night and then her husband’s face, she sips water from her husband’s hands who is there with her at that particular moment. Since Jatin is away, Nita needs to find an alternative as she is then unable to tolerate her ‘thirst’ anymore and Radha ‘helps’ her quench her ‘thirst’, not only of water but of all her unfulfilled desires.

So even *Karva Chauth* has been questioned via the question of Nita: “*Achchhaa Ashok bhaiya kyon nahi rakhte ye vrata Swami ji ke liye?*” (And why doesn’t brother Ashok observe this fast for Swami ji?) The clear indication seems to be that the ritual should be considered important not only as a mere ritual, that to be imposed on women only, but more importantly for the feeling of love and attachment for the person it is observed for. And the closing of the fast, where Radha makes Nita drink water, completely subverts the whole notion of this long observed ritual of Indian tradition. It actually establishes clearly the bond of loving relationship between these two women.

Neeta, however, is shown to take all the initiatives. One night she comes to Radha’s bed. Judging her desire, Radha asks her to go back although she herself is burning with desire at that moment. But Nita doesn’t go back and then Radha also follows her desire. They make love intimately and after the loveful act of sexual fulfillment, it is Nita who surprisingly asks: “*Radha, Kya humne koi bhool ki hai?*” (Radha, Have we done something wrong?) Radha’s reply is more surprising, in the light of her submissive personality, who after a moment daringly says “*Nahi*” (No).

‘Sita’s *agnipareeksha*’ runs through the film as a recurring motif, sometimes via the episodes of *Ramleela* performance or the serial *Ramayan* being played at home T.V., watched by the family members. On the one hand, it portrays the internalization of the desirability of the women like Sita: chaste and pure; obedient, loyal and survelient; and on the other, to interrogate the same desirability of such

traditional beliefs and codes; and more importantly to present the possibility of choices in the lives of women via the characters of Radha and Nita.

Nita and Radha go to *Durgah* (a holy place in Muslim religion) where Nita expresses her wish to be with Radha and offers to leave home to be with her with the simple logic that the other members of the family have already got their alternatives. So they need not bother much. Moreover, Nita is very confident of their livelihood by opening a hotel with Radha and managing it together. On coming back, Radha catches Mundu red handed masturbating while watching a porn film in the presence of biji. She scolds him severely and Mundu argues that he did all that for a little pleasure and has not committed any crime finding some time for himself, out of the monotony of his life of only working all the time. Being scolded again by Radha, Mundu makes her realize that he knows everything about her relationship with Nita and warns her to be beware of his knowledge that he can anytime use as his own defense, but obviously against her.

Mundu's behaviour makes Radha think deeply about herself. She feels shocked and scared of the changes in her own life : "*Ye sab naya hai mere liye. Ye ehsaas, zaruraton ka, ichhaaon ka.*" (This all is new for me. This feeling of my own desires and needs.) Nita observes her tension and Radha vents out that Mundu did what he felt like doing without bothering anybody in the house. The question that comes to her mind is a universal one that comes to every woman's mind whosoever starts living her life with self-determinism thereby going against the standard (suppressing) norms of the society: "*Kya itna bura hai apne bare mein sochna?*" (Is it so bad to think about oneself?) In Radha and Nita's context, this question contains the answer also as becomes evident in their relationship in the forthcoming situations.

Nita is given an offer by Jatin that she can leave him if she wills so, as he is not going to leave Julie (his girl friend), but at the same time she is made to realise her status of a 'single woman' in the society who has to face many problems: "*Akeli aurat ka jeena aasaan nahi hai is duniya mein.*" (It is not easy for a single woman to live in this world.) He then offers her to become a mother of his child to keep herself busy. And in response Nita calls him "*bloody fool*" very violently, just speaking on his face "*FOOL*" in its alphabetical version. Jatin slaps her but she slaps him back. She is no more ready to be used and abused by patriarchal frameworks and

suppressing norms of the institution of the family, where a wife has simply to accept the fate and situations of a life devoid of love and respect.

Mundu being extremely jealous of Radha-Nita relationship, calls Ashok one day from Swami ji's cottage just to show him the ongoing love making between the two women. Ashok initially watches from the keyholes and then opens the door angrily. Radha and Nita remain silent but Ashok goes back immediately, unable to bear that shock. Nita is happy that they can leave rather easily then: "*Ek baat kahun, theek hi hua vo jaan gaye.*" (Let me say one thing. It's good that he knows now.)

Radha, however, wanted it to happen the other way round. She says that she would have told Ashok herself about her relationship with Nita. And Nita's words in the context are quite appropriate to reflect upon the narrow mindset of society, that can never go beyond the acceptance of heterosexual relationships, thus unapproving the same sex relationships altogether:

"Ye jaan lo Radha koi shabd nahi hai jo bataa sake ki hum dono ka rishta hai kya. Hum kya hain ek doosre ke!"

(Do understand Radha that there doesn't exist any such word that may define our relationship, that may explain what we are to each other.)

Radha asks Nita to go first and she will follow as she certainly wants to talk to Ashok before leaving. Radha wants to feel the pleasure also of being waited upon by a lover: "*Agar aisa ho ki kahin aur raah dekho tum meri to aana hoga mujhe. Haan, mujhe aana hi hoga.*" (I'll have to come if it happens that you wait for me somewhere. Yes, I'll have to come.)

Biji's spitting on Radha's face after knowing the reality of her sexual relationship with Nita is just one more sign of the disapproval of society, so far as a woman's choices are concerned .

Ashok comes back and asks Radha to help him again for his test of control. For him, it is still a "*saadhna ka sawaal*" (a question of penances for accomplishment: it may be noted here that it is really difficult to translate *saadhana* in English as it is actually a concept perhaps alien to the English language). But Radha refuses bluntly telling him that she has repented enough and is going to leave house.

Ashok wants to take her to Swami ji to help them come out of the destructive darkness of desires. But Radha's last words to Ashok sum up the whole journey of a woman who has struggled enough to realise her desires and will to live :

*“Sunno ki icchaaon ke bina mein zindaa hi nahi thee. Itni ichchhaayen
jaagi hain mere andar aur suno, vo ichchhaayen:
Ichcha hai ki mai jeeyun,
Ichcha hai Neeta,
Ichcha hai ki uski mohabbat, uske zazbaat, uska pyaar.”*

(Listen! I was not even alive without desires. So much of desires have aroused in me and do listen to those desires of mine:

I desire to live.

My desire is Neeta.

My desire is her love and her feelings.)

The ending scene is significant and symbolic. Radha's saree catches fire. Ashok watches all this but a jealousy ridden egoist patriarch doesn't even try to save her for the simple reason that she has refused to follow his smothering dictates. He takes only biji out in his lap, to save her from fire and Radha has to manage herself to protect herself. She gets out somehow and reaches *Nizamuddin Durgah* where Nita was waiting for her. Radha is in torn and burnt clothes somehow wrapping her body; and Nita is there to take care who hugs her with love and the film ends.

The throughout running '*agni pareeksha*' becomes the closing scene also of the film. But the director has subverted even that. Here it is Radha who faces this trial by fire, but comes out unscathed. The absence of Sita from this test is significant enough to understand that in our society, it is and can be any woman who may have to face this trial but then she can come out unharmed as just following one's desires is no sin at all.

All the films analysed in this chapter put before us the picture of women as 'real beings' rather than their depictions as 'ideal beings'. These are the 'real' women who have their own grievances, desires, ambitions, feelings and perspectives. They wish to be their real selves rather than being the submissive sacrificing selves.

Indian Cinema has often depicted women at the two extremes. They have been shown as either docile, submissive and noble, or wayward, reckless and irresponsible. But some film-makers certainly seem to have gone beyond those stereotypes. Projecting the awakened feminine consciousness, they have portrayed the ‘flesh-and-blood’ women who brave the world to explore their sexual desires. An awareness and understanding of their own body and the realization of the desires associated with it has made them think about their rights on their own body.

Rather than being perfect figures (according to the social parameters) and martyrs, these women have been shown to introspect, understand, realize and move ahead to find their own pleasures and thereby their own identity in their own way. Defying and deinstitutionalizing the patriarchy, they have come victorious in the assertion of their own individuality. Exercising their right on their own selves in all possible manners and specifically on their bodies, they have shattered the male world of vain vanity. With their bodies working for them as resistant spaces, they step forward unbridled yet honest; free yet responsible; and brave yet balanced.

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