

CHAPTER - 2

The Wonderful Woman: The Stereotypes Subverted

As it has already been discussed in the preceding chapter, films reflect society as well as possess the potential to influence cultural norms. Women issues are central to every society as without woman, no human and social relationships can be defined. Yet 'woman' herself remains at the periphery so far as her own identity, recognition and honour is concerned.

Tradition and society have always forced a woman (from the very birth) into "a place, a status and a role" [Sudha,2000:6] as Simon de Beauvoir also says: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." [1997:295] She is 'naturalized' with the qualities that are granted to her. The social conditioning of women is such that they are greatly influenced by the society into which they are born. It therefore, becomes difficult for them to deviate from the expected social patterns as they become a part of "their psyche, their personal, religious and Indian identity." [Jayashree,2008:105]

Indian films generally tend to reinforce these patterns of social expectations. Women have often been shown as the guardians of tradition. They are considered to be the upholders of the family honour, ideals of chastity and purity in all their roles, be it the mother, the wife, the beloved or even the daughter. Confining their roles to traditional patriarchal framework of Indian society, Hindi films have often portrayed women as perfect figures and martyrs for their own families, thus depriving them of any sense of power and agency.

But if we take a fresh look at the different roles played by women and introspect into the kind of typecast that was being perpetuated earlier, we would be able to sense and realize that some film-makers are breaking the shackles of the set formulae. The roots of patriarchy ingrained within the social nexus are being swept by the breeze of social change, and the same has got reflected in the shift of the camera's focus from merely a woman's body to her identity as an individual. A large number of the films have hitherto depicted women to either provide glamour, relief, respite and entertainment or uphold virtue and values. But now there are certainly some films that depict them, not as one-dimensional characters but as having different shades. Ranjita Biswas has rightly written in the context: "It is to the credit of the script writers too that they are projecting women as real and contemporary instead of being clones of calendar-art images of 'bhartiya nari'." [<http://www.glamsham.com/movies/features/08/oct/31-the-typical-bollywood-heroine-image-is-changing-100816.asp>]

Hindi cinema that has hitherto successfully institutionalized patriarchal values is now questioning the traditional mores that were imposed on women. Women are being shown to break away from the age old conventions to create a world of their own. The woman of substance that has been missing for so long has become visible in such films. She is now shown as an empowered being, living her life independently, taking her own decisions. A woman who has rarely been shown to talk about herself has now got a separate and independent space where we can see her with her own experiences and dilemmas as well. Women playing 'larger than life' roles centred around love, care, discipline, obedience etc. are now portrayed as 'believable' characters. Film-makers now show the transgression of women from private to public domain; from known lands of security towards the unknown depths of uncertainty, which again depict their strength to face that. All that was 'ideal' is now depicted as 'real'.

The present chapter, focusing on the four traditional roles of woman: the mother, the wife, the beloved and the daughter, intends to show the transformation that has taken place in these roles which puts before us the women in all these roles as not the docile and submissive stereotyped characters but rather as the bold and empowered mothers, wives, beloveds and the daughters who might even be labelled as 'rebels' as they don't conform to social norms. The women who were earlier the prisoners to the roles of selfless mothers, sacrificing wives, sensuous but submissive beloveds and tormented daughters or daughters-in-law are no more the prisoners. They excel in their respective roles and their experiences have been valourised. Remaining very much the mothers, the wives, the beloveds and the daughters, these women are now out of their socio-culturally created and defined cells and possess a new and independent identity as the magnificent mothers, the vociferous wives, the bold beloveds and the dauntless daughters. So these women in their respective roles put before us the possibility of their independent existence with due honour and respect in family and society.

Keeping in view the limitations of the present research, two films will be taken for each role to discuss the above mentioned four roles of women.

The Magnificent Mothers

The first film taken up to discuss the role of the mother is *Hazaar Chaurasi ki Maa* (1998), directed by Govind Nihalani. The basic story is of Dibyanath Chatterjee (Anupam Kher), his wife Sujata Chatterjee (Jaya Bachchan), and their son Brati Chatterjee (Joy Sengupta). They live in a middle class existence in Calcutta. Sujata is a quiet, devout Hindu, religious and compassionate woman who has learnt to live for others only. Brati has finished his school and is now attending college. The parents are proud of him but the father doesn't trust him much for his friend circle and often warns him against them, time and again reminding him of the prestige of his so-called 'prestigious' family. Then everything is shattered when suddenly they are informed by the police that Brati has been killed. For some reason, the father doesn't go and it is only Sujata who has to go to identify Brati's body. For her, the loss is terrible and she mourns and laments inconsolably but only within herself. She knows now that her life will never be the same again, for the police will call her the mother of corpse No. 1084. This is where the film has taken its name from.

Sujata struggles to understand Brati's death. She meets his friends one by one, comes to know that Brati had a girlfriend Nandini Mitra (Nandita Das), and that's when she finds out that Brati was a part of a rebel group often referred to as 'Naxalbari'- a militant leftist group. As she delves deeper and deeper into Brati's former life, she begins to understand his struggle, and the causes and the motives behind it. In the process, she discovers herself also more as a mother, as a woman, as an individual, and decides to continue to further the cause her son had begun.

Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa is very importantly the story of a mother who is an ordinary mother, trapped in the love of her children. She fulfils all her motherly roles as expected and prescribed by the society. What is interesting and significant in the film, regarding her role, is to see how she transforms into a mother who gets empowered not only as a mother, but as a person also. All the strength comes to her through her own son's ideology and belief in life which she comes to realise and understand later in the life, when the son is killed in some anti-Naxalite attack. She meets his friends and their families in order to know about that aspect of her son's personality and reality which she was unaware of. She could never understand her

son's real self, as her own love and affection towards him never allowed her to think beyond that self of him which she desired as a mother.

The film begins with a phone call that Sujata receives. On hearing the voice of a woman, the caller's blunt query is "*Ghar me koi aadmi nahi hai kya?*" (Is there no man present in the house?). So the very beginning puts before us the notion of the supremacy and importance of a man in urgent affairs as compared to that of a woman who is not considered even worthy of understanding and handling serious matters. When the caller gets confirmation of the absence of any man in the house, he asks the lady to come to the mortuary for verifying the identity of her son. Since the men of the house don't wish to go for verification, for some reason (even after knowing the reality) it is mother who goes. She verifies the body of her son but is not allowed to take body home and it is cremated in a group funeral. In the next day's newspaper, the news appears but the name of the son is not there. It is only a number 1084 that becomes his identity. The men of the house are happy over the hidden identity of their son as according to them, he has done something anti-social and so they don't want their family's name to be defamed via his activities. The mother however, doesn't think like them. Though she doesn't know much about her son's so called anti-social activities, yet she is not ready to accept so easily that her son did something wrong or bad.

The director seems to have purposely begun the film showing the mother (a woman) to go to the mortuary for identification of her son's dead body. Unlike other mothers who may get uncontrollable on seeing their son's dead body, this mother is shown as strong and sensible mother capable of maintaining her grace even in the face of the death of her beloved son.

The film switches frequently between the past and the present and Sujata recalls various situations where she was with Brati- her son and then she is shown in the present, reflecting on the same past as a narrator. The father always mistrusted Brati and his friends. Brati always tried to convince his father that he and his friends were honest and hard working and whatever they did was all for the sake of humanity and the under-privileged sections but the father never understood. As a consequence, Brati used to argue with his father quite violently. Sujata was never allowed to come in-between any argument, so she could never understand the real cause of their

arguments. Brati's father calls him "a brilliant student of a dignified and cultured family in Calcutta" and so he is advised to stay away from his friends. He is even made fun of by his own father for being "revolutionary". According to the father, "Wealth is the mother of all happiness in life" where as Brati does not agree with his father's views. He rather criticizes his father's mindset and says: "Ek class hai jo is soch, is attitude, in values ko kaayam rakhti hai aur mai usi soch ke khilaaf hun." (There is a class which maintains and sustains this thinking, this attitude, these values and I am against that thinking) The mother is too simple to understand the issues of class, attitude and values. Brati also as a conventional son asks her to avoid indulging in all that:

"Sujata : Kya class, kya values, kya ravaiyaa? Ye sab ulajhi hui baaten meri samajh me nahi aati.

Brati : Tum samajhana kyon chaahti ho maa? Kya karogi samajhkar?"

(Sujata : What class, what races, what attitude? I am unable to understand these tangled issues.

Brati: Why do you want to understand mother? What will you do understanding all this?)

Brati reminds the mother to tighten a button on his shirt. She is supposed to accomplish it as a motherly task and is asked to avoid the matter of values and attitude in life, as if all her values and attitudes have to be confined within her role in the family, as a conventional mother or wife. When the police officer comes to interrogate the parents, he also blames only the mother again for the attitude of Brati who, according to him, was an anti-social agent: "Aap uski parvarish theek se nahi kar paayi.....varna vo ek gunda kaise ban jaata." (You could not bring him up properly. Otherwise how could he have become a goon). The mother feels deeply hurt and agonized over this blame but remains only quiet. She is actually not ready to accept that her son was wrong due to her. She is rather more agonized at her own lack of understanding regarding her son's aims and the struggle he did for them. She recalls that Brati had started remaining aloof but she could never sense it completely till he was alive. She questions her own conventional motherhood who saw only the outward reality of her son, and expected him to be happy always. She herself remained lost in the overt happiness that her son's face showed:

“Kaisi maa, andhi, behri maa jisne kuchh nahi dekha kuchh nahi suna. Bas tumhaare chehre ki muskaan ko dekhkar muskaraati rahi, aaraam ki neend soti rahi...”

(What kind of blind and deaf mother I am! I never saw anything, never heard anything. I smiled just with the smile on your face and slept soundly...)

Although the same lines might again put her in the stereotype of a mother who is feeling guilty over not having understood her son, yet they define her as an unconventional mother, who wishes to move beyond the confines of a happy household and the definitions of a ‘dignified and cultural family’, just in order to understand and honour her son as a person who lost his life for a genuine concern.

The mother used to remain so much engrossed in the family’s values and followed blindly the definitions of a happy family that even when Brati had once shared his dream with her, she was not ready to trust his dream. Once he had come late and on being asked the reason for coming late, he had said.

“Maine ek sapnaa dekha hai maa, kraanti ka sapnaa.....andhkaar me bhataakta jeewan...roshni dene ka sapnaa dekha hai maa...a world of equality, peace, justice and dignity to everyone.”

(I have seen a dream mother : a dream of revolution... life lost in darkness... a dream of giving light mother...a world of equality, peace, justice and dignity to everyone.)

And the mother although blind in the love of her son, could still not trust her son’s dream since that dream again was an unconventional one for a family person. She had said then:

“Ye to ho gayaa tera naatak. Ab bataa sach kya hai.”

(This all was your drama. Now tell me what is the truth.)

The mother decides to meet Brati’s friends families. These were the friends who were killed along with Brati. She visits those families sparing some time from

her bank job and household responsibilities and comes to know about her son's involvement and association with the Naxalite movement. Sometimes she feels good to know what her son fought for and sometimes guilty that she could not sense all that; and also sometimes sad on knowing that the mothers of all other friends knew everything but Brati never told her. She again questions herself regarding the trap of motherly feelings that might have resisted her son's efforts:

“Brati, Tumne mujhe kyon nahi bataaya? Socha ki mai samajh nahi paungi. Mera moh rok lega tumhe.....”

(Brati, Why didn't you tell me? Did you consider me incapable of understanding that? Thought that my love would stop you from pursuing your aim?)

The mother meets Nandini (Nandita Das), Brati's friend and when Nandini shares with her the real happenings, the mother tells that she was unaware of everything. Nandini's role is important as an agent who shakes the mother out of her traditional and typed role of a family woman and makes her realize that people should not be so unaware of the important happenings around them. They should try to know and understand what happens and why. Nandini says:

“Hamesha ki tarah kabhi kuchh maloom hi nahi hota. Aap log anjaan hi hote ho. Bas ghatnaayen ghat jaati hain aur fir khatm ho jaati hain. Itna sab kuchh hone ke baad nahi lagta ki jaanana chahiye ye sab kyon aur kaise hota hai!”

(You know nothing as usual. You people are ignorant. Things happen and then they end. When all happens, don't you feel you need to know why and how it happens!)

Nandini tells the mother all that happened with Brati and shows her own grief of losing a lot along with Brati. The mother consoles Nandini in her motherly manner but Nandini speaks very bluntly about the traditional mothers, as according to her they remain only the mothers of their children and never think of coming out of their stereotype. They usually are unable to follow one sole aim and put at stake all that they possess, because it actually lies beyond their prescribed role in the family. The

following conversation is important to understand the gap between Nandini as an enlightened and empowered woman and the ‘mothers’ who are never even allowed to think anything beyond their traditional, duty bound and strictly confined motherly roles. Nandini here acts as an agent not only to highlight the gap but also to emphasize the need for women to come out of their stereotyped submissive motherly roles to become the awakened aware mothers and responsible citizens as well:

“Nandini: Brati nahi raha. Aur bhi kitna kuchh nahi raha.

Mother : Aisa mat kaho Nandini.

Nandini: Aap aur meri maa- dono ki ek si baaten! Aap nahi samajh sakti kyunki kabhi ek hi maksad ke liye apnaa sab kuchh daanv par lagaaya hi nahi aapne.

Mother : Sach hai humne kabhi aise jiya hi nahi.”

(Nandini: Brati is no more and a lot more has been missed.

Mother : Don’t say so Nandini.

Nandini: You and my mother—both have same things to talk.

You cannot understand because you have never put all of yours at stake for one single aim.

Mother : It is true that we have never lived like that.)

The mother thus confesses her duty bound role where she has never been able to think beyond the welfare of the family and her own fixed role in those confines. Nandini appreciates the mother’s honesty, however: *“Kum se kum aap sach se bhaagati nahi.”* (You don’t run away from truth, at least.)

Nandini tells the mother about Brati’s plan to leave home two days after his birthday. Although birthday mattered the least to him, yet he wished to stay on 17th January-his birthday, only for the sake of his mother’s happiness. This again makes the mother feel guilty over her conventional role of a mother who actually traps and resists the children in the name of love:

“Maine hi use jakad rakha thaa. Uske pyaar ki meri bhookh ne hi use....”

(I had trapped him. It was my hunger for his love...)

Mother continues meeting Nandini frequently and one day she is with her when Nandini reminds her of her daughter's engagement. The mother gets up to go with the promise to come again but Nandini tells her bluntly not to come again, as she doesn't want the mother to relive the past :

“Kya karenge aakar? Kya milega aapko? Jo beet gayaa hai usme kab tak jeeyengi?”

(What would you do coming here? What would you get? How long would you live in what has passed?)

Nandini repeatedly acts as an agent to make mother realize her own potentials. Her blunt refusal to meet her again is only one step further to make the mother realize the importance of the present. The mother comes back home. Since it is the day of her daughter's engagement, she is expected to be at home, as a dutiful and responsible mother. But she gets late in coming back and is asked by her husband where she was. What follows is a remarkable display of her aggression and assertion before her husband. She refuses to tell him anything and moreover says that he doesn't even deserve to ask her anything as she also never asked him anything and moreover, he too never shared anything with her in thirty years of their marriage. She asserts herself not only as a wife but as a mother also who can go anywhere according to her will and her priorities; who cannot be expected to follow the family norms silently and blindly.

Mother is asked to get ready for the engagement function but that very day, for the first time, she refuses to put sindoor. The maid servant asks why she doesn't want to put the sindoor and the context makes mother recall Brati's question which he had asked once. She replies recalling Brati in that situation but her reply given to the servant is important to understand the mindset of a woman who is taught to live for nothing but others:

“Brati : Maa, Itne saalon se, itne samay se apna farz kaise nibhaye jaa rahi ho?”

Mother: Bachpan se yahi sikhaaya gayaa hai. Ab to aadat si pad gayi hai. Ghar ghar aur ye ghar! Chaubees ghante ye ghar... har pal maine is tootate hue ghar ko sambhaala hai aur pal pal

karke kab meri zindagi fisal gayi, mujhe pataa hi nahi chala. Bekaar. Ek dum bekaar.aur isme maine Brati ko bhi kho diya.....Ab mai ye sab nahi karungi. Mujhse nahi hoga.”

(Brati : Mother, how come you are fulfilling your duties since years and so long?

Mother: This has been taught since childhood. Now I have got used to it. Home, home and this home. All the twenty-four hours this home. Every moment I have taken care of this broken home and I could never realize when my own life slipped. Vain. All in vain...and I have lost Brati also in this....I will not do it anymore now. I will not be able to do.)

The mother accepts before her son the training she has been imparted since childhood about how to keep home intact irrespective of her own desires and feelings as an individual but the concluding words put before us the possibility of her denial of following the family and social codes at the cost of her own life and its ambitions.

The mother happens to meet Nandini after a span of twenty three years. By this time, Nandini is working with the tribals and the mother too has started some social welfare centre. The mother used to feel agonized on 17th January as it was the birth as well as the death date of Brati. But her words before Nandini are indicative of her mental growth where she has learnt to accept the life as it comes, and with rather more positivity. She tells Nandini:

“Pehle main yaad karti thee 17 January Brati ka janm evam maran din hai. Ab itna yaad rakhti hun ki 17 January uska janmdin hai.”

(Earlier I used to remember 17th January as birthday and death day of Brati. Now the only thing I remember is that 17th January is his birthday)

Nandini loves Brati deeply and is apprehensive about her marriage with somebody else. She feels that she would never be able to forget Brati and so would never be able to love again. But in that situation also, the mother’s consoling and

counselling words to Nandini again show the mother's growth who has learnt to move ahead in life, in all possible manners and aspects :

“Nandini kuchh bhi ho jaaye, zindagi me fir se pyaar karne ki kshamata kabhi nahi khoni chahiye beta.”

(Whatever happens Nandini, one should never lose the capacity to love again in life)

This is the same mother who used to gather strength from Nandini who once had even spoken very bluntly to her regarding her attachment with the past, when she had found the mother trapped in the past with Brati who was no more. Now she has learnt to accept the past also positively or else leave it and move further forward in life with new hopes and possibilities. Her own life is a perfect example of this as we see in the next important scene of the film. The mother comes out to see Nandini off and in front of her eyes, Neetu, one of Brati's old friends, is shot dead. She can see two men there with guns in their hands. One escapes knocking her down but she forcefully clings to the other's leg and doesn't leave him till people gather there to grab him. He is caught at last.

The ending scene of the film is quite moving, appropriate and significant to prove the metamorphosis of mother. She shares her experience and thoughts with Brati as if he were present :

“Brati, aur ek hatya hui aaj, raah chalte khule aam, sabke saamne. Neetu, tumhara saathi jo pichhle kai saalon se mera bhi saathi thaa, use do hatyaaron ne goliyan daagkar maar daala...vo silsilaa...jiski tum kadiyaan ho, ruka nahi chal rahaa hai. Tamaam koshishon ke baavajood, par koshish bhi thaki nahi. Nandini aur Neetu ke saath main bhi isme shaamil hun. Ek gum ko seene se lagaakar nahi-armaan ko apnaa banaaye hue. Tumhe apna beta nahi maanati ab. Tumhaare sapne ki saanjhidaar hun mai. Ek saathi, comrade, dost.”

(Brati, one more killing happened today, walking on road, in front of everybody. Two killers killed Neetu by bullet shots, Neetu, who was your friend and mine also for the last few years...The sequence of

events of which you are the part, has not stopped. It is going on, despite all efforts. But efforts also are not exhausted. I too am involved in that along with Nandini and Neetu. Not with a sorrow in my heart but making it a dream of mine own. I don't consider you my son now. I am a sharer of your dream. A companion, comrade, friend.)

We therefore see in mother actually a new mother; a new concept of motherhood; a new definition of mother who along with being a life giver to her child is his friend also- a real comrade in his struggle for justice. So the mother crosses the conventional boundary of four walls of house and moves ahead to create and construct her new identity. Being Brati's mother indeed, she now understands the life and the world outside home and her own responsibility for society as a person. Instead of making her weak, her motherly self provides her strength not only to establish her son's true identity, despite all surrounding social barriers but significantly her own identity also. The simple minded mother now knows and understands the meaning of being not only a mother but an individual as well.

The second film taken up for the role of the mother is *Paa (2009)*, directed by R.Balki, which discusses two women as mothers. *Paa*, overtly the film of a child suffering from a rare genetic disease Progeria, is "actually a mother-son story" as rightly said by the film critic Rajiv Masand.[<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/masands-movie-review-paa-a-heartfelt-story/106502-8.html>] And even more than that, it is also and undoubtedly a film about the two women, the two important women in the film both of whom play their motherly roles very remarkably and gracefully, as an another film critic Taran Adarsh has written in the context: "It may've been publicized as a father-son film, but the women - mother and granny-play equally pivotal parts."

[www.bollywoodhungama.com/moviemicro/criticreview/id/531746]

The basic story of the film is that of a medical student Vidya (Vidya Balan), who, after an affair with a political science student, Amol Arte (Abhishek Bachchan), gets pregnant and is disappointed when she is asked to get an abortion. She speaks to her mother (Arundhati Naag) who had brought up Vidya all alone after her husband's demise. When plainly asked whether she wants to keep the baby or not, Vidya decides to go ahead with the pregnancy. Already wondering how she'll bring up a child all

alone, she's shattered to know her newborn is suffering from Progeria, a rare disease causing premature ageing in children.

Auro (Amitabh Bachchan) is her son : an intelligent, witty 13-year-old boy but due to Progeria, he is 13 mentally and very normal, but physically he looks five times older. In spite of his condition, Auro is a happy boy. He lives with his mother Vidya, a gynaecologist, by that time, but is completely clueless of his father's identity. Amol is an ambitious and ideal politician who is out to prove to the world that 'politics' is not a bad word. Vidya conceals this from Auro that Amol is his father. Amol meets Auro when he visits the boy's school. Though he does not know that Auro is his son, he takes him to Delhi to see the President's House. Auro, who knows the truth by that time, (as Vidya tells him) tries to get his mother and father back together, but Vidya resists, still hurt by the fact that Amol wanted her to have an abortion when they first found out she was pregnant. Amol realises his mistake though, and proposes to Vidya, as he is still in love with her. He stays by Auro's side when he finds out that Auro is his son. Auro's health begins to deteriorate and as he reaches his 13th birthday, his physical defects intensify. However, he is finally able to reunite his mother and father once again as Vidya gives in to her motherly love for Auro. Auro, succumbing to his disease, says his last words "*Maa*" and "*Paa*" before dying with a satisfying smile.

The film begins with the award function of King Edward VII School. The chief guest is the Mr. Amol Arte, who comes and observes various models made by the students of the school. He steps at a plain white globe. Although not deliberately painted by the student, this globe attracts Amol and he appreciates the student's vision and creativity. Interpreted by Amol as a symbol of plain white world with the scope left to colour it in the colours of one's choice, the globe bags the first prize. We come to know that Auro has made it. Auro is the same child who is suffering from Progeria. Auro is very happy to receive the prize and shares his victory with his mother when he comes back home from school. Vidya does not know anything about the person who has given that prize to Auro but watching news of the school function at TV, she comes to know that Amol is the M.P. who has given prize to Auro.

It makes her recall her time and relationship with Amol. She had met him and happened to meet him repeatedly, all but coincidentally. Gradually she came more close to him and got involved sexually also. The scene of her coming physically close

to Amol projects her as a liberal woman who is not only uninhibited about sex before marriage but also conscious and aware about the safety measures of having sex. In a gesture, she asks Amol to use condom during sex but since he hasn't any with him at that moment, they make love without any preventive measure. The consequence is that Vidya gets pregnant. She immediately meets Amol and sharing the fact of her pregnancy, asks him to marry her. Amol at that time, however, is completely unprepared and unwilling to marry. He refuses to marry Vidya not because he is uncaring, unloving or irresponsible but because marriage comes between his ambition to go further in politics with a noble aim of putting before people the correct meaning of 'politics' as he says; "I want to prove to the world that politics is not a bad word". He does not want to even think about marriage and suggests her to give priority to her education and career and get the child aborted. Vidya, hurt at his refusal, goes away angrily, saying:

"Mujhe yakeen hai ki tum bahut bade politician banoge and I promise ki meri wajah se tumhaare raaste me kabhi koi rukaavat nahi aayegi. Bye".

(I believe that you will become a big politician and I promise that there will never be any hurdle in your path due to me. Bye.)

For Amol, Vidya's reaction is unexpected and he asks her to stop and tries to talk to her in the same regard. But she again speaks angrily and quite ironically:

"Karungi baat. Ek aakhiri baar. Sirf tumhaare mann ki shaanti ke liye. Sirf ye bataane ke liye ki tumhaari ye problem ab problem nahi rahi."

(I will talk to you one last time. Just for the sake of your peace of mind. Just to tell you that your problem is no longer a problem.)

From her side, Vidya decides not to interfere in Amol's life although she desperately wished Amol to understand her situation and support her desire. She needs his love and support the most in this crucial time when she is pregnant not only because she loves him; not only because she has not yet married him and has pre-marital pregnancy, but more importantly because she wishes to honour the 'mother' in

her and for that sake, she certainly needs Amol to complement her. Amol however still insists on getting the abortion done. But Vidya doesn't want to think of an abortion. She wishes to give birth to the child. But despite her earnest wish to become a mother, she is in a fix. Like any ordinary woman in our society who gets pregnant before marriage, she is confused about what decision to take. It is important to note here that she is not scared but rather more worried about rearing up the child alone and also about her ongoing education in medicine and the practice afterwards, as we see in her following conversation with her mother.

Vidya desiring to honour motherhood, gathers all her strength to share her reality with her mother. Yet her strength appears weak before the strength of her mother who boldly comes forward to support her daughter despite knowing the socio-moral codes that may create a lot of problems for them. The mother is shown to be such a bold person that without questioning Vidya for anything that she has done, she asks only one question and keeps on repeating it till Vidya feels strong enough to follow her desire. The following conversation is interesting and important to understand the desire and confusion of Vidya, and the boldness and courage of the mother. Not only the conversation, but the whole body language of both the woman is quite remarkable to convey their minds at the very moment:

“Mother (Coolly) : Tumhe ye bachcha chaahiye ya nahi chaahiye?”

Vidya (eyes down) : Maa, Tum mujhse naraaz nahi ho?

Mother (determined, unagitated cool): Tumhe ye bachcha chaahiye ya nahi?

Vidya (hesitatingly): Maa, Simple nahi hai maa. Practical bhi sochna padta hai. Teen saal ki padaai baaki hai. Practice karni hai.

Mother : Tumhe ye bachcha chaahiye ya nahi?

Vidya : Maa, society mebina shaadi kiye?

Mother (sternly) : Bachcha chaahiye ya nahi?

Vidya : Maa, Tumse baat karna bahut mushkil hai.

Mother : Vidya

Vidya : Akele bachche ko kaise paalungi?

Mothe : Vidya, tum 2 saal ki thee jab tumhaare papa guzar gaye. Akeli

thee mai. Tumhaare saath to fir bhi main hun. (Vidya looks at her mother in surprise) Tumhe ye bachcha chaahiye ya nahi?"

(Mother : Do you want this child or not?)

Vidya : Mother, You are not angry with me?

Mother : Do you want this child or not?

Vidya : Mother, it's not so simple. One has to think practically. Three year education is yet to be finished. I have to do practice also.

Mother : Do you want this child or not?

Vidya : Mother, living in society..... without marriage?

Mother : Want the child or not?

Vidya : Mother, it's too difficult to talk to you.

Mother : Vidya

Vidya : How will I bring up the child alone?

Mother : Vidya, you were two years old when your father expired. I was alone then. With you, it is me at least. (Vidya looks at her mother in surprise). You want this child or not?)

Vidya conveys her consent via nodding her head. She cries out of happiness at her mother's, not only consent but understanding and support as well. The boldness of her mother takes her out of all her conflicts and confusions. On the mother's face also, a smile is visible. This is the smile of contentment and happiness at her daughter's happiness. The mother is more happy to see her daughter move beyond her doubts and conflicts so as to follow her desire. She is happy to fulfill her own role of mother to support her daughter in time of need. Unlike any other stereotyped mother, she neither thinks even for a moment to admonish her daughter for indulging in pre-marital sex, nor questions what she did and why she did that. She belongs to that category of mothers who are individuals first and therefore know how to honour the individuality of others, be it their own children. And this mother is empowered enough to understand and honour the individuality of her daughter who has become pregnant before marriage and now wishes to give birth to that child without any support from the child's father as he has already refused to marry her for some of his

own reasons. Mother supports Vidya in every manner. She takes complete care of her in her pregnancy as well as for the studies.

Finally Vidya gives birth to a male child. The child is named Auro. Soon Vidya comes to know that the child suffers from a rare genetic defect named Progeria. Vidya feels deeply agonized as the disease has no cure and also the age of such kids is not more than thirteen or fourteen years. But she doesn't let her agony overpower her strength and gathers all her courage to rear Auro up happily, doing everything possible for him that she can and here also her mother helps her in the best possible manner.

Vidya is shown to be so strong and happy a mother that all her problems in regard to Auro never make her feel sad or repentant of her decision to give birth to Auro. Vidya is a gynaecologist. Once a lady and her husband come to her with certain gynaecological problems. The couple is unwilling to go for the child as they remain too busy. Vidya suggests them to go for the child otherwise it would increase the lady's physiological problems. Despite having an abnormal child, Vidya is able to feel the pleasure of motherhood. Her moments and experiences with Auro make her feel so good and elated that she says to the couple.

“Having a baby changes your life for better. Mere experience se bataa rahi hun.”

(Having a baby changes your life for better. I am telling it out of my experience.)

Vidya loves Auro so much that she is ready to face any hardship for his sake. Once he is hospitalized due to his deteriorating physical state. He is growing in age and medically, he becomes eighty years of age. The doctor advises Vidya to free Auro from school's strain at least. But Vidya is not ready to compromise with Auro's passion. He loves going to school as there the whole environment, and the company, of his friends boost up his spirits and he is able to maintain his own positively. So she says:

“Nahi doctor. He loves school, Aur mai use school jane se kabhi nahi rok sakti”.

(No doctor, He loves school. And I can never stop him from going to school).

Then comes a situation where the mother wants Vidya to tell Auro about his father. Auro already knows Amol although not knowing that he is his father also. Vidya is agitated at her mother's wish. When Auro was seven years old, Vidya had told him all regarding his father, the ambitions of his father and his decision also not to marry Vidya and also his wish of getting the child aborted. Irritatingly Vidya tells her mother that Auro had understood everything very simply then which they however on their part, had tried to convey him not so straightforwardly. "*Jo ghuma fira ke samjhaane ki koshish ke thee, sab seedhe seedhe samajh gaya thaa vo.*" (He had understood everything straightforwardly what we had tried to make him understand in riddles.) Mother is still worried if Auro by chance asks anything about his father. Vidya still says. "*Use paida karne waala nahi chaahata thaa ki vo paida ho, fir kyon poochhega.*" (The father never wanted him to be born, then why would he ask.)

According to Vidya, Auro knows everything already and therefore, there is no need to tell him anything more. Yet the mother's worry and the questioning attitude irritates Vidya more and she literally shouts saying "*Kya chhipa rahi hun maa?*" (What I am hiding mother?) and the mother's reply is "*Naam*" (The name). The mother thus makes Vidya realize that despite telling Auro everything, she has actually hidden from him the 'name' of his father.

This situation again puts mother on a high pedestal so far as the boldness is concerned. Supporting Vidya for everything giving her all her due, the mother now feels concerned about Auro also. She feels it to be Auro's right as a child to know the name of his father and insists on Vidya not to deprive Auro of this right of his. Here again the mother comes before us as an empowered mother worried about the individuality of even Auro.

Vidya realizes her mother's wish and decision. Once when Auro is in hospital, she shows him a picture of Amol and hers and tells Auro that Amol is his father and for some reason, he hadn't supported Vidya's decision. Auro asks if Amol knows about him and if not, why didn't Vidya tell him. Vidya's reply in this context is

remarkable that puts her before us as a woman who being conscious of her own desires and ambitions knows how to honour the ambitions and decisions of others. Despite all her love for Amol and her wish to marry him and go for childbirth, she respected the decision of Amol although with a grudge at that very moment. She however, never interfered in his life and never tried to force her right on him as his beloved or even the unwed mother of his child. She knows the value of dreams in one's life and also the agony of getting that dream shattered.

“Auro : Tumne use kyon nahi bataaya?

Vidya : Kyonki main uski hitchhi nahi bananaa chaahati thee.

Auro, Har insaan sapne dekhta hai. Lekin sapne me hitchki aa jaya na toh sapna toot jaata hai”.

(Auro : Why didn't you tell him?

Vidya : Because I didn't want to become his hiccup. Auro,
Every person sees dreams. But the dream is broken if
the hiccup comes in between.)

Vidya explains to Auro the meaning of hiccup by doing it literally, just in order to prove to him the hinderance, caused by a hiccup. Auro then question Vidya as why didn't she tell him that for all the years that had passed. She expresses her love for Auro saying that she didn't want to share Auro with anybody. But then she wants to give due respect to his individuality also. Besides being aware of her own rights, she is conscious of Auro's right also on his father. So she wishes to leave it to Auro's decision if he wishes to get shared with somebody or not.

“Auro : Ye gift itne saal tumne mujhe kyon nahi diya?

Vidya : Kyonki mai tumhe share nahi karnaa chaahati thee, kisi ke bhi saath.

Auro : Ab share karnaa chahati ho?

Vidya (hugging Auro) : Stupid. Ab tum bade ho gaye ho.

Ab tumhe decide karnaa hai ki tum kisi ke saath share hona chaahate ho ya nahi.”

(Auro : Why didn't you give me this gift all these years?

Vidya : Because I didn't want to share you with anybody.

Auro : You want to share me now?

Vidya : Stupid. Now you have grown up. Now it's upto you to decide whether you wish to get shared with somebody or not?)

Vidya does not hesitate to express her own thinking and wish also. She never wanted Amol to know anything about Auro. She says it very clearly. "*Mai nahi chaahati ki usko pata bhi chale ki tum kaun ho*" (I don't want him to even know who you are). But since she knows that Auro is in touch with Amol after the award function of the school, and feels himself close also to him, she decides to go forward with the revelation to Auro of his father's name and whereabouts.

Auro remains doubtful of his mother's decision to tell him all so suddenly. He asks Vidya if she is doubtful of his survival till his next birthday, as his physical state is already deteriorating. He asks further about what she wants him to do with the gift she has given him. But Vidya tells that Auro himself has to decide whether they should interfere in Amol's life or not; "*Ki ab uski hichaki bane yaa na bane*" (whether they should be this hiccup or not).

Rather than being a submissive and sacrificing mother, she plays her motherly role very gracefully, as an enlightened and empowered individual who uses her discretion to take decisions free of all prejudices. Despite her desire of not letting Amol know about Auro, she just leaves her own feelings behind, only to give Auro his due rights in life.

Afterwards Auro plans to visit Delhi with Amol as he wishes to see Rashtrapati Bhawan. Vidya is a bit reluctant but Auro understands her as a mother, and more importantly as a woman and promises that he will not let Amol know anything: "*I will not be a hiccup, chill*". He gets ready to go with Amol, reaches Delhi and discusses a lot with Amol, simultaneously satirizing politicians, VIP culture and deteriorating state of the country. For some reason, he feels unwilling to visit Rashtrapati Bhawan and comes back finally.

He rejoins the school and once he collapses while listening to some of his schoolmates' conversation. He is immediately hospitalized. Amol comes to know about his hospitalization and visits him in the hospital. He sees Vidya there and is shocked to know that Auro is his own son. Vidya however, doesn't show any of the

soft feelings on her face. She rather leaves the room as soon as Amol enters. No feeling of attachment to Amol can be seen on her face despite the fact that he is the father of her son and that he is the same Amol who had wanted Vidya to get the child aborted. Even his feeling of affection and concern for Auro doesn't move Vidya. Amol however, wants to talk to Vidya regarding Auro, as he has some misunderstanding. He thinks that Vidya had lied to him about abortion and the fact is that she gave birth to Auro. But now when he comes to know that Auro is his son, the same child of his who he didn't want to come in this world, he feels shocked, agitated and happy at the same time. Considering his fatherly right on Auro, he talks to Vidya very angrily. But Vidya is not so soft a woman to be subdued by his undue anger and irritation. When he talks about his right on Auro, Vidya retorts back aggressively to make him realize the real definition of being a father. The following conversation takes place between them:

“Amol : Tumne jhooth kyon bola?”

Vidya : Jhooth nahi bola.

Amol : Come on Vidya, you told me you had an abortion.

Vidya : Maine abortion ki baat kabhi nahi ki, sirf ye kahaa thaa ki tumhaari problem solve ho chuki hai. Tumhe humaari vajah se kabhi koi problem hui? Humne kabhi tumhaari life me interfere kiya? Nahi na, ab bhi nahi karenge. To jao jaake desh badlo. You are free as always. Go.”

Amol : Wait a minute. He is my bloody son too.

Vidya (shouting with severe angst) : Just by lending me your bloody sperm doesn't make him your bloody son. Baap banane ka matlab sirf bachcha paidaa karna nahi hota.

(Amol : Why did you lie?)

Vidya : I didn't lie.

Amol : Come on Vidya. You told me you had an abortion.

Vidya: I never talked about abortion. I had said only this that your problem has been solved. Did you ever face any problem due

to us? Did we even interfere in your life? No. We with not interfere even now. Go and change the country. You are free as always. Go.

Amol : Wait a minute. He is my bloody son too.

Vidya : Just by lending me your bloody sperm doesn't make him your bloody son. Becoming a father doesn't mean just the birth of a child only.)

Vidya therefore is completely justified in what she did. She not only took a bold decision to give birth to her child despite being a single, that too, on unwed mother, but also never tried to exercise any kind of emotional or social right on Amol, being the mother of his child. To the undue anger of Amol, she reacts with her pertinent questions which Amol is unable to reply. Being free herself, she had respected the ambitions and dreams of Amol and even now she imparts him the liberty to be "*free as always*". She still doesn't want any of his mercy or help, as she has learnt how to tackle life single-handedly without the support of a man.

Amol re-enters the room of Auro and caresses him with his fatherly feelings. He tells Auro that he is his father and Auro only says that he is a 'bastard' son as Amol had not solemnized marriage with his mother, according to the rituals: "*Tumne vo round and round nahi liye the naa maa ke saath*". (You had not taken those rounds with maa). (Auro here is referring to the rounds that are a part of Indian marriage rituals, where the bride and the bridegroom take rounds around the holy fire, to solemnize the marriage.) Auro makes Amol realize his mistake for which Amol feels sorry. He says sorry to Vidya also and requests her to forget the past and start life with him afresh. Vidya is still adamant on staying without Amol as she doesn't need him anymore. She feels that she has lived life following her own desires and decisions, and therefore, she doesn't need anything more to begin again. So she says, "*Mujhe fir se shuru karne ki koi zaroorat nahi*". (I don't need to begin again).

Meanwhile the whole media creates a fuss and Amol's father requests him to forget Auro otherwise it will ruin his political career. Politics is that ambition of Amol due to which he had left Vidya also long back. He was not able to marry Vidya as he couldn't allow love and family to dominate his ambition of becoming a good politician. But it is the same Amol now who is not bothered about anything except

Auro. He faces media frankly and goes to the extent of even confessing his mistake publically on a T.V. Channel. While he confesses his mistake, it is Vidya again who comes victorious with her grit, courage and determination to live life on her own terms. Amol tells publically that he should have used a condom while making love to Vidya. But since he didn't use it, Vidya got pregnant and like every scared boy friend, he too asked Vidya to get the child aborted. But it is important to know in Amol's words what Vidya did:

“Maine use kaha bachcha gira do. Usne gira diya. Bachche ko nahi. Mujhe.”

(I asked her to get the child aborted. And she left me instead of leaving the child by abortion).

He feels fortunate however, that he has been able to know and meet his son Auro, somehow. He again requests Vidya, via that TV programme, to forgive him and marry him. But Vidya is not ready to say 'Yes'. The situations of her life have made her so strong and rigid that she can't be soft for even Amol. The only thing that can soften her is her love for Auro as her mother rightly tells Amol:

“Ek bachche ko akele paalne se aurat ka dil sakht ho jata hai Amol. Vo narm hota hai to sirfus bachche ke liye”

(Amol, a woman's heart gets hard by rearing up a child alone. It gets soft but only for that child.

And the mother's statement proves to be true in a later scene in the film. It is seen that Auro gets deliberately hysteric asking Vidya to shake hand with Amol. Vidya doesn't and Auro collapses. He has a stroke and his condition gets worse. Meanwhile, a classmate of Auro comes to visit him in the hospital. This is a girl who had unknowingly hurt Auro. It was her first day in the school and she saw Auro suddenly in front of her. Not knowing anything about Auro's disease, she had got scared of him and ran away screaming in fear. The incident had left Auro deeply hurt since the incident had made him painfully aware of his own abnormal outlook. And afterwards, Auro always left the place wherever that girl came. Now it is the same girl who has come to Auro, just to say sorry to him for whatever she did out of her

ignorance. She gives a drawing sheet to Vidya which is shown to Auro. It is Auro's face filled up of the word 'sorry' written several times. She confesses that she had hurt Auro, although unknowingly and had afterwards tried a lot to feel sorry to Auro. But since he never listened to her, she has come again to seek his forgiveness. The girl speaks a very significant line:

“Auro, Understand, jo galati kartaa hai vo galati sehane wale se zyaada hurt hota hai”.

(Auro, understand, the one who commits mistake is bound to be more hurt than the one who bears that mistake).

Auro smiles looking at that girl which is a clue that he has forgiven her and she goes back. But he looks at his mother also, in the hope to see if she too has understood something from the context. Vidya looks at Amol and that seems to be an indication that she is trying to consider the 'forgiveness' to Amol,

Meanwhile, Auro's condition gets out of control. He starts collapsing and again asks Vidya and Amol to shake hands. Vidya gets up immediately and holds the hand of Amol, thereby showing it to Auro as the evidence. Auro then asks them to go *“round and round”*. Vidya and Amol literally do that also. The mother of Vidya is shown to recite the related Vedic mantras to bless them. When they finish with those rounds, Auro is able to speak *“Maa”* and *“Paa”* only once and then he dies. The film ends showing Amol and Vidya sitting in the rainfall where Vidya ultimately breaks down in Amol's arms.

Looking at the role of mothers of both the women in the film, it is significant to understand that they fulfill their motherly roles very boldly and gracefully. They are mothers of course, but not the ones that a society expects. They are not the mothers to sacrifice their whole beings and work only for the welfare of their kids, putting a stake their own pleasures and priorities. Vidya as a mother is bold enough to decide to go on with the birth of her child in her unwed state itself. She is tolerant enough to bear with an abnormal child quite happily and lovingly. She tries her best to give everything to Auro that she can, from her own situations. But she is not ready to surrender to the circumstances which otherwise any other woman would have done in a rule bound society. As a mother, she is worried about everything of her child

including even his right to decide which parent to stay with, when he gets mature enough to take his decisions. But nowhere do we see her ready to compromise with her own individuality. She never even thinks of going to Amol even if it is for the sake of Auro. Understanding Auro's attachment for Amol and his need perhaps of the company of a father, she moves forward only to honour Auro's rights, telling him all about Amol and asks him about his decision.

Unlike any other compromising and self-sacrificing mother, who would have consented unwillingly to even stay with the man who is the father of her child, she frankly admits that she herself doesn't want to interfere in Amol's life. As a mother, she can honour Auro's wish as a matter of his right but not compromise with her own self-respect. The situation, however, changes in the ending part of the film where she joins Amol but there also, it is her own decision to hold the hand of Amol. It's only the wish of dying Auro and the 'sorry' message of Auro's classmate that make her realize the importance of 'forgiveness' in one's life. It is important to note that neither her own mother and nor Amol himself can make her consent to marry Amol. Earlier Amol's lack of support in her decision had made her leave him and now her own realization makes her join him. On her part, she leaves nothing to make Amol realize his mistake that he had committed years ago. It is her stubbornness for her own honour that she refuses Amol every time which finally forces him to feel sorry publically. So keeping her individuality and self-respect intact, she finally joins Amol, just for the sake of Auro, her child who, unfortunately dies afterwards. She fulfills her motherly role devotedly for her child in her own way, taking her own decisions, unbothering the social norms.

More than Vidya, it is her mother who stands as a perfect example of an unstereotyped mother. Unlike any other mother, who would have either scolded severely or even rejected her own daughter at the news of her pre-marital pregnancy, Vidya's mother stands bold, confident and sure of her own role where she decides to put the happiness of her own daughter on priority thus giving a damn to all the prescribed roles of a mother or a daughter. It is the mother's boldness only that Vidya is able to decide in the favour of her own will and pleasure. It is the mother's support only for a pregnant unwed daughter that Vidya dares to go for the child birth. The mother is shown to be totally unbothered about what society will say. She is bothered

only about what her daughter desires. And it is again for her daughter's happiness that she talks to Amol and expresses her happiness on his coming back to ask for Vidya. She is ready to accept Amol not because he is the biological father of Auro but because she is able to trust him as a responsible father and a nice husband as well. The mother too, thus stands before us as magnificent mother who lives life on her own terms thereby giving respect to the individuality of all including her own self first of all. Both the mothers belong to those category of women who "do not sweep aside the existing order. Rather they assert their own discourse in the face of the male one by breaking it up; subverting it and in a sense, re-writing it." [Mulvey:182 as cited in Chakrabarty,2009:169]

The Vociferous Wives

Lajja (2001), directed by Rajkumar Santoshi is the first film taken up to discuss the role of wife. *Lajja* tells the story of four women: Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala), Maithili (Mahima Chawdhary), Janki (Madhuri Dixit) and Ram Dulari (Rekha), all of whom have been named after Sita. These are the real women translated to reel, as the director Raj kumar Santoshi himself mentions in the beginning of the film itself. He also expresses the need to sensitize people towards providing the due honour to women:

"None of the characters or situations depicted in this film are imaginary or fictional, really speaking. They are echoes of what is happening all around us in our so called civilized society. At best, these voices, cries, and shrieks, pleas and whispers- have been amplified for deaf people to take note. After all, the greatness of a civilization can only be measured by the status of its women"

[*Lajja* (2001): The Beginning Note]

In the name of 'Lajja', they all suffer, struggle but ultimately come out victorious with their identity established with due honor and respect that they deserve as women, in their respective situations. The only woman who is not able to survive the brutal exploitation is Ram Dulari but still she remains unforgettable for her grit, courage and empowerment.

Vaidehi (Manisha Koirala) lives with her husband Raghu (Jackie Shroff) . On the surface level, she lives a sophisticated life, but behind closed doors, her husband is abusive and has extra-marital affairs. When she takes a stand for herself, she is banished from the household. She goes back to her parents' house but they too reject her. Vaidehi soon finds out that she is pregnant. Meanwhile Raghu meets a car accident, which results in him being unable to father a child. When he discovers that Vaidehi is pregnant, he calls her, faking remorse, and asks her to return. Vaidehi agrees, thinking Raghu has mended his ways. Raghu and his father plot for the child to become their heir and if Vaidehi intervenes, she will be killed. Meanwhile, Vaidehi is informed by a friend about Raghu's true intentions, and so she escapes from his henchmen. She is helped by Raju (Anil Kapoor), a petty, but kind-hearted thief. To hide from Raghu and his henchmen, Vaidehi joins a wedding procession.

At the wedding, she meets Maithili (Mahima Chawdhary), a bride-to-be from a middle-class family. Maithili is marrying a man who hails from a rich background. The two women witness Maithili's father being hassled by demands for an opulent wedding, which he cannot afford, and is forced to pay dowry. Vaidehi tries to convince Raju to help Maithili's father by giving him some money. Initially Raju refuses but later he changes his mind, and returns to give his money to Maithili's father. The situations however, take a turn and Maithili herself refuses to marry her fiancée Atul.

Meanwhile, Vaidehi is found by Raghu, and forced into going with him. On the way, they encounter a protest mob. Raghu gets out of the car, which gives Vaidehi the chance to escape. She arrives in Haripur, a small town, where she meets Janki (Madhuri Dixit), a theatre actress in love with her colleague. Janki is pregnant, but not married. She doesn't care for society's norms. She is lusted after by the theatre director, Puroshottam (Tinu Anand), an older man who keeps his wife, Lata (Jaya Bhattacharya) confined to their house. Puroshottam talks against Janki to her lover, which creates a rift between them. Janki is outraged and reverses up a scene during a performance of the Ramayan. This leads to an outcry from the audience and she is assaulted by the audience, leading to her having a miscarriage. Vaidehi confronts Puroshottam, who threatens to call her husband. However, Lata intervenes and takes Vaidehi to the station and puts her on a train.

The train is robbed by bandits but the passengers are saved by Bulwa (Ajay Devgan), a local dacoit. Vaidehi faints at the sight of blood, and Bulwa takes her to the local midwife, Ramdulaari (Rekha). Ramdulaari bravely opposes the village leaders Virendra (Gulshan Grover) and Gajendra (Danny Denzongpa) who exploit innocent women, young and old. When her educated son, who is trying to educate the villagers against the wishes of Virendra and Gajendra, falls in love with Gajendra's daughter, Sushma (Aarti Chabaria), all hell breaks loose. Gajendra slyly locks Ramdulaari in her house and sets out to find her son. When her son runs away with Sushma, Virendra and Gajendra, along with their goons, rape Ramdulaari and burn her alive. In a fit of rage, Bulwa and his goons kill Virendra and his goons. Vaidehi escapes with Sushma and Ramdulaari's son.

Gajendra is making a move into politics, so when he is applauded by the local authorities, Vaidehi intervenes and exposes Gajendra as a rapist and fraud through a heart-wrenching speech, which drives all the women in the audience to assault Gajendra, who is later killed by Bulwa. The speech changes Raghu's attitude towards Vaidehi and he decides to mend his ways. The two return to New York as a proper married couple. Vaidehi gives birth to a daughter who is named Ramdulaari. She meets Raju again, who is now a taxi driver and married to Maithili. She invites him to a charity dance show with Janki in the main role, wherein all the money from her shows goes to fund women's organizations in India.

Each story of injustice is followed by an explosive climax that proves that one can only push womankind so far before she pushes back. The movie satirizes the honour with which women are placed in society and the restrictions on them. The fact that the four women's names (Maithili, Janki, Ramdulaari, and Vaidehi) are all versions of Sita, the ideal Hindu woman's name, is important in itself as it has actually been used to debunk the myth associated with the very name 'Sita'. All the Sitas fight against injustice in their own ways. None of them is the docile, submissive, passive Sita who puts everything at stake, even her own self, just for the sake of the honour of family and society. They are shown to move beyond all social barriers to establish a just identity of their own, preserving their honour at the same time.

The present focus is on the character of Vaidehi. Her journey in the film is remarkably visible to us as a victimized wife in the beginning, who finally establishes

herself as a victorious one. She subverts the stereotyped role of a wife, not following the whims and wishes of her husband that question her identity and honour. The scene opens with Vaidehi waking up of some unpleasant dream and waiting for her husband Raghu (Jackie Shrauff) to comeback and later on the servant tells her that he had come but has gone again to the club, telling that he would be late in coming back. Vaidehi is not able to resist and reaches the party venue where she sees Raghu dancing with and even kissing Anita (Ritu Shivpuri): a woman who is his business partner's wife. Vaidehi does not like it but the explanation of Raghu is simple that he is a modern man of twenty first century and does not mind doing all this. Moreover, he wants Vaidehi to grow up to the changing times, as according to him, she is a woman of old ideas if she doesn't accept all that Raghu does: "*Kitne puraane vichaar hain tumhaare!*" (How old your ideas are!) When she further questions Raghu for this, she is not only beaten by him but also made aware of her downtrodden status of being a 'wife' as Raghu says: "*You deserve it. This is not the way to behave with your husband.*"

Vaidehi feels dishonoured as a wife since her husband is not ready to understand what she desires from him as a wife. He selects a very costly fur coat for her which she refuses to take as she doesn't need that. All her materialistic needs are fulfilled, yet she craves for love and her feelings to be respected. She tries to make Raghu understand what a wife needs from a husband. Her words are a kind of comment on the insensible and insensitive attitude of parents also who bother only the materialistic needs of their daughter and simply forget the 'woman' in her who needs love, care and respect also from the husband and his family which she is going to join. Likewise Raghu also seems to be completely insensitive to those needs of a wife, as the following conversation shows:

"Vaidehi: Achchhe kapde, keemti zavar, badaa ghar, London, America- Yahi sab dekh ke har maa-baap apni beti ki shaadi karaa dete hain. Kya ek ladki ko apne pati se sirf yahi chahiye?"

Raghu: Aur nahi toh kya chaahiye? Dukh, dard aur gareebi! Come on, grow up."

(Vaidehi: Nice clothes, precious jewellery, big house, London, America- All parents see just this and get their daughters married. Does a girl need only this from her husband?)

Raghu: What else then she needs? Agony, pain, and poverty! Come on, grow up.)

A situation comes when Raghu has to go to USA and she is supposed to accompany him. But she refuses to go and the situation projects her before us as a completely unconventional wife and even daughter-in-law who is daring enough to speak about the flaws in her husband's behavior and express her feeling of hurt over that. She shares her feelings with her father-in-law in the hope that he will understand her but even the father-in-law is a perfectly chauvinist man who is confident of Vaidehi getting adjusted in the given situations. He gives example of his own wife who too had adjustment problems in the beginning years of the marriage but had got well adjusted later. So he consoles Vaidehi saying : "*Tum bhi seekh jaogi aur Raghu bhi tumhe samajhne lagega.* (You too will learn and Raghu also will start understanding you). On this, the agonized Vaidehi speaks her heart out as she finds Raghu unable to understand her even as a human being:

"Vo mujhe tab samjhenge daddy jab pehle vo mujhe insaan samjhen. Unhe lagta hai main ek machine hun- unki gadi ki tarah- jab chaho, jahaan chaho, jaise chaho, ghuma sakte hain, le jaa sakte hain."

(He will understand me daddy when he first understands me a human being at least. He thinks that I am just a machine- like his car- he can get me on any path, anytime, anywhere, in any direction.)

Her reluctance to accompany Raghu is not accepted and she is forced to go, specially for the sake of the family's 'honour'.

The party again becomes a site for Vaidehi's pain as there Raghu's business partner tries to flirt with her and wants her to respond positively. She feels severely hurt and disrespected and leaves the party. Raghu comes after her, not to share her grief or to console her, but rather to ask her to accept his ways of life or else she should leave him:

“Jise meri izzat ki parvah nahi , mere ghar mein uske liye koi jagah nahi....go back to India”.

(The one who doesn't bother for my honour, has no place in my house...go back to India.)

Humiliated bitterly, she comes to her father's house, only to face more humiliation. Instead of listening to her and understanding the reality and pain of her situation, the father scolds her for coming back. The following conversation among the parents and the daughter very realistically presents a picture of an average Indian household where a daughter is expected to fulfill all the duties of being a wife unquestioningly; where a daughter is considered not an 'individual', but only a 'woman' being assigned different roles that she is required to fulfill irrespective of her own 'honour' and 'identity':

“Vaidehi: Kya ye mera ghar nahi hai?

Father: Nahi, shaadi ke baad pati ka ghar hi ladki ka ghar hota hai .

Mother: Ladki ki doli jis ghar me ek baar jaati hai , vahaan se uski arthi hi nikalni chaahiye.”

(Vaidehi: Is this not my home?

Father: No, after marriage, the husband's home only is the woman's home.

Mother: A woman's funeral bier only should be taken out of the home once she enters it after her marriage.)

Vaidehi's sister tries to speak in her favour but even her voice is silenced by the parents, as her's also is a 'daughter's' voice, and moreover, the parents are now worried for her marriage also. Vaidehi's father says to her younger sister, *“Badi beti ke aise lakshan dekh kar tumse kaun shadi karega?”* (Who will marry you after seeing such activities of the elder sister?) Vaidehi is supposed to follow the social norms for the welfare of the whole family but nobody bothers her desires and wishes or identity as an individual:

“Mother : Log tarah tarah ki baaten karenge. Tujhe vaapas jana hi padega beti. Ab is ghar ki izzat tere haath mein hai .

Father : Aur us ghar ki bhi ijjat tumhare haath mein hai. Samjhi.”

(Mother: People will talk in various ways. You will have to go back daughter. Now this family’s honour is in your hands.

Father: And the honour of that family also is in your hands.

Understood!)

Vaidehi understanding her status in her own parent’s family says ironically:

“Haan, samajh gayee. Har ghar ki ijjat ladki ke haath mein hai. Ladki ki koi ijjat nahi .”

(Yes, I’ve understood. The honour of every family is in the girl’s hands. She herself has no honour.)

Vaidehi stands before us as any ‘real’ daughter who has to live for the honour of ‘all’ who in turn don’t even think about her honour as a person, as an individual, as a daughter, as a wife or for that matter in any of her womanly roles assigned to her by the same society.

In the mean time, when Vaidehi is in India, Raghu meets an accident and is later asked by his father to bring Vaidehi back. Raghu and his father’s attitude is shown to be so hypocritical that the same Raghu who doesn’t want at all to bring Vaidehi back and even calls her “*a big pain*”, gets ready to bring Vaidehi back when his father tells that he has become impotent after the accident but Vaidehi is pregnant to give him the status of a father. (It is important to understand here that she is a ‘pain’ for Raghu only due to her non-submissive attitude)

The situation is quite ironical for any woman who doesn’t get the due respect unless she becomes a ‘mother’ and there again, she is important, neither as an individual nor even as a mother. Her role is considered important only till the child’s birth, who actually becomes the ‘heir’ of the family to take the family name ahead. And in the same situation, Vaidehi ironically becomes important as ‘one mother equal to ten wives’. Actually Raghu refuses to bring Vaidehi back and says to his father, “*Main aapko das bahuyen laakar de sakta hun*”(I can bring you ten daughters-in-law.) The father then says : “*Das bahuyen! Ek varis nahi, jo sirf Vaidehi de sakti*

hai.”(Ten daughters-in-law! No heir, which only Vaidehi can give.) So the father further convinces Raghu that he will have to bring Vaidehi back, just in order to get the child and afterwards he can divorce Vaidehi and go for even another marriage, if he might so desire. They even discuss the possibility to kill Vaidehi if she gets fussy about the child.

Vaidehi is called and convinced by Raghu to come back. Again like any other woman who is unfulfilled enough to seek emotional fulfillment from her husband, Vaidehi agrees to go back as Raghu talks to her very lovingly. But very soon she comes to know about the whole conspiracy of getting called back, when Raghu’s family doctor warns her of this. Vaidehi does not want to go back to the place where not only herself respect but her very life is in danger. She however, is disturbed by her own father’s attitude towards her who time and again reminds her “*Pati ka ghar hi sab kuchh hota hai*” (The husband’s home is everything.) as rightly cited in the earlier chapter by Kakar in the context of Indian families and situations. She is forced by the circumstances to go back. She somehow gathers courage to deceive Raghu’s men at the airport and runs away. She runs from place to place, struggles to protect herself and at last finds a refuge in the old house of Raju (Anil Kapoor), who had saved her earlier also from Raghu’s goons. During all this, she meets three other women, all struggling with their fate of being women. The background song aptly express the struggle of a woman who in search of her identity suffers and suffers :

*“Tu nadi si beh rahi, saagar kahin nahi
Mod to kai mile , manzil kahin nahi
Kaun dagar kaun nagar tu chali kahaan?
Dhoondh rahe nain thake apnaa aashiyaan.”*

(You are flowing like a river, nowhere is the sea
There were several byways but nowhere was the destination
Which path, which city are you going?
The tired eyes are searching for their shelter.)

But Vaidehi’s journey is not of a struggle without destination. She speaks, suffers and struggle more as she knows the value of self respect. She meets a person named Bulwa (Ajay Devgan) who is shown to be an enemy of all who exploit others

in any name, and also a protector of the honour of women. When Raghu comes hunting for Vaidehi, he has to confront Bulwa who rejects his offer of money in exchange for Vaidehi. Bulwa, however convinces Vaidehi to go with Raghu and asks her not to feel scared. Vaidehi comes but a bloody struggle ensues between the gang of Bulwa and the goons of Raghu. Ultimately Raghu comes in the possession of Bulwa and he is just about to kill Raghu when Vaidehi's shriek comes as a refuge. Understanding Vaidehi's request as a wife, Bulwa spares Raghu. Vaidehi, however doesn't want to go with Raghu, just because he is her husband and the father of her yet-to-be-born child. For her, her self respect is more important than just the reality of her motherhood. And she leaves Raghu saying :

“Baat sirf mere bachche ki nahi hai. Mere atma-samman ki hai. Mai use hi bachaa rahi hun.”

(Its not only a matter of my child. It's more a matter of my self respect. I am saving that only.)

Vaidehi, during her stay in village, has also been in the company of Ramdulari (Rekha), another bold and experienced woman. In a state of helplessness and despair, once she had expressed her grief to Ramdulari :

“Samay badal gayaa hai, haalaat nahi, Bulwa ki amma se Phoolmati tak aurat ki haalat vahi ki vahi”

(The time only has changed, not the situations. It's the same for women from the mother of Bulwa to Phoolmati.)

(Phoolmati is a low cast woman who is shown to be humiliated by upper caste men.)

But Ramdulari had encouraged her further showing her hope for a better future for women, provided the woman herself learns to respect her own womanhood:

“Aurat badlegi Vaidehi jab aurat khud apni kadar karnaa seekhi, khud apni izzat kari , tabhi sab ou ki izzat kari hai”

(The woman will change Vaidehi when she learns to respect herself. Then only people will respect her.)

Before Ramdulari, Janki (Madhuri Dixit) had made her realize the potentialities of a woman when she had called a woman and a girl child “*bechaari*” (helpless):

“Ai! ladki ko bechhari nahi bolne ka. Ye kaahinaat ki jitni khoobiyaan hain na, vo sab ladki me daal di hain upar waale ne. Vo agar apne jalwe pe aa jaye na, toh achchhe- achchhon ko nachaa deti hai.”

(Don’t you call the girl pitiable. The God has instilled in her all the virtues of the world. She makes even the better ones dance if she is forced to be her real self.)

And then Bulwa instills in her more hope and courage to fight against injustice and exploitation of every kind, just in order to be called a human being in the true sense of the word:

“Jo koi julm ke khilaaf avaaaj uthaawat hai, vahi insaan hai, vahi jeeta hai.”

(Whoever raises a voice against injustice is a true human being. S/he only lives.)

Vaidehi decides to expose Gajendra and reaches a social function where Gajendra has to be honoured. He is about to be honoured with a shawl when Vaidehi reaches the stage and speaks boldly:

“Maa bahen ki ijjat utaatrne wale ko ye ijjat paane ka koi haq nahi”.

(The person dishonouring the mother and the sister has no right to get this honour.)

Gajendera is left with no other option except blaming Vaidehi herself in order to defend himself and says :

“Lajja nahi aati ek aurat hokar jhooth bolte hue.”

(Don’t you feel ashamed of lying as you are a woman?.)

And then Vaidehi's speech becomes a remarkable event of the whole film where she speaks representing all women in their different roles and accepts that she feel ashamed, but very significantly, not for herself being a woman, but rather on her own hypocrite countrymen, her own passive and docile brothers who see women getting victimized but remain silent and ultimately on the helplessness of her own fraternity due to all such pitiable social conditions:

“Jahaan naari ko Durga, Saraswati, Kaali-Maa ke roop me pooja jaata hai, vanhi ek maa ka balaatkar kar ke jinda jalaa diya gayaa, aise paakhandi desh me maine janam liya, ye dekh kar mujhe lajja aati hai. Apni aankhon ke aage julm hote dekh kar bhi khaamosh baithe apne bhaaiyon par lajja aati hai. Apni behno ki laachari par mujhe lajja aati hai.”

(I feel ashamed of having born in such a hypocrite country where on the one hand, the woman is worshipped as Durga, Saraswati, Kaali Maa and on the other, a mother is raped and burnt alive. I feel ashamed of my brothers who remain silent despite watching injustice in front of their own eyes. I feel ashamed of my sisters' helplessness.)

In all her words, her own agony gets expressed clearly when she questions the parameters of a woman's identity set by the society:

“Kya aurat sirf ek bachcha paida karne ki machine hai? Uska apna astitva nahi hai? Apni koi pehchaan nahi? Culture, dharm ke naam par halla karne waale in buraaiyon ke khilaaf koi aavaj nahi uthaate?”

(Is woman only a child-producing machine? She doesn't possess any existence of her own? She doesn't have any identity of her own? Why don't the people making noise in the name of culture and religion raise their voice against such evils?)

Her speech is able to ignite the fury of all women present there. They get provoked by the power of the truth of her words and attack Gajendra there and then, and he is killed at their hands. Gajendra's end is significant and symbolic of the end

of woman's misery thus marking Vaidehi's victory. Raghu comes at last seeking forgiveness with literally folded hands and expresses his gratitude also for Vaidehi for being his wife:

“Kya mein tumhari maafi ke laayak hun Vaidehi? Mai bahut bhaagyashaali hun ki tum meri patni ho .”

(Do I deserve your forgiveness Vaidehi? I am too fortunate to have you as my wife.)

She forgives him at last and they are united. We come to know later that she gives birth to a girl child and lives happily afterwards with Raghu.

Vaidehi's journey is remarkable as a wife who does not yield to all that society demands, irrespective of what a woman needs and wants for herself, even as a wife. Considered the upholder of the honour of the father's as-well-as the father-in-law's family, Vaidehi thinks about her own honour first and struggles a lot to keep it intact. And her determination to preserve her most precious possession (her self-respect) helps her throughout. The same husband begs to get her back who had once planned to even kill her. So Vaidehi proves herself to be a wife who is soft (since she forgives Raghu, forgetting all pains and tortures he gave her) but not submissive and volatile rather than being docile.

Kuchh Love Jaisa (2011), directed by Barnali Ray Shukla, is the second film taken up for discussing the wife's role. Basically it is the story of a woman Madhu Saxena (Shefali Shah) playing a homemaker whose life revolves around catering for the needs of her two kids and husband Shravan (Sumit Raghavan), but in turn leading a life of complete neglect and disregard. Madhu decides to venture out looking for her own happiness when on one of her birthdays, her husband refuses to even wish her or do anything special. As it is on February 29, her birthday comes only once every four years. Deciding to celebrate the day on her own, she gets herself a whole makeover, goes for shopping and buys even a car as well.

While resting in a cafe she meets Raghav Passport (Rahul Bose), a mysterious stranger who she thinks is a private detective. He does not dissuade her from the idea because he is really a wanted forger who is escaping the police who is after him at the

information of actually his girlfriend Ria (Neetu Chandra). Needing cover until he can leave Mumbai, Raghav pretends to be following an unfaithful husband who is planning to murder his wife. He agrees to accept Madhu's help on the imaginary case. As they pursue the non-existent husband, they begin to feel attracted to each other. Events become more complicated when Madhu realizes that he is not a detective and that he has been deceiving her. Finally, Raghav decides to give himself up to the police and Madhu returns to her family and the film ends.

Now to understand the role of Madhu, it is necessary to understand the whole sequence of situations critically. The film begins on Feb 29, 2000. It is the birthday of Madhu, in the beginning years of her marriage. The couple celebrates the birthday together very lovingly with cake, candles and romance. The imagery of feet has been taken very beautifully and aptly to show the journey of relationship between the husband and the wife: the feet close towards each other showing their loving proximity; then the feet in separate directions and at a distance showing the increasing gap between them; and then the wife's feet on the bed and the husband's out of the bed on the floor showing the height of indifference towards each other. This all is to show actually the journey of a married couple who stay lovingly together in the beginning years. Then children come in their life and the situations change. The hectic schedule of husband at office and of wife at home with kids, leaves no scope and space for warmth in their relationship. This film focuses specifically on the life and desires and frustrations of a wife who remains at home. The husband is too busy to expect anything from life and wife and moreover, he is exposed to a variety of situations and personalities that he might not feel any emptiness in his life. But the wife who remains completely engrossed in household responsibilities is actually alone at home. Reflecting upon her life, she gets the opportunity to think about her own identity and status at home as well as outside and then she realizes her need to be loved and understood more.

So beginning from the birthday of Madhu, the film takes us to the situation where it is again the birthday of Madhu but this is the birthday after quite long years of marriage, when even the kids also have grown up. The day comes and contrary to Madhu's expectations, nobody in the family remembers to even wish her. Every coming moment fills her with the hope that she would be wished but actually all of

them at home: the husband and the kids are shown to forget that special day of her life. Shravan has really forgotten and the kids do it deliberately, as we come to know latter on in the film, since they desire to plan a surprise party for their mother. Moreover, 29th February is more important a day for Madhu, as it comes only once in four years and she desires to receive a special treatment on this day.

Unfortunately Shravan is not able to remember her birthday till he leaves for office. Madhu takes even this to be a deliberate act by Shravan and still waits for a surprise. The door bell rings and she jumps to the door in the excitement of getting a surprise from Shravan, but the immediately opened door makes visible only a garbage container and we realize it was only a garbage collecting man. Madhu's disappointment is visible. Then Shravan calls from office. Madhu again gets hopeful but the way Shravan talks and the purpose of calling her, regarding some office file, is more disappointing to Madhu. Agitated at Shravan's attitude, she asks him ironically to go on with his office work and not talk to his wife. The scene is important to understand the attitude of a husband who considers himself too smart but is unbothered about the desires of a wife and does not even honour what she does for home. Shravan is shown holding a card in his hand on which it is written "*Mr. Clever*". And when angrily Madhu suggests him to "*go on*" as he has "*got a long day*" at office, Shravan tries to prove himself clever enough to understand and decide what he has to do and says to Madhu: "*You don't need to tell me what needs to be done Mrs. Saxena*". There ensues an argument between the two which again leaves Madhu dishonoured and hurt. Madhu confidently speaks about her role at home : "*You know, this place called home depends on me*". She wants to convey to Shravan that the home can't move without her, even for a single day. But Shravan is cold and blunt enough to not acknowledge her care and love she showers on the family and narrates to her the story of a lizard, only to agitate her more:

"Let me tell you one thing. Ek kahaani suni hai chhipkali ki. She feels like she is holding... chhat of the house. Kahin vo vahaan se chali gayi toh entire chhat will come crashing down."

(Let me tell you one thing. Have you heard the story of the lizard? She feels like she is holding the ceiling of the house and thinks that the

entire ceiling will come crashing down if by chance she leaves her place.)

This is extremely humiliating to Madhu as a home-maker as well as a wife. She sacrifices her whole being for the welfare of the family and nothing is acknowledged. Moreover, her efforts are made fun of, and Shravan even suggests her: “*Don't be so ordinary. Get alive. Khush rahaa karo*” (Be happy) without even realizing that to remain happy and alive, a woman needs not only love and respect but also the loving acknowledgement of what she does for others selflessly. However, Shravan's suggestions to Madhu not to be “*so ordinary*” boomerangs on him, as we see in the film later.

Madhu's father calls her to ask about any plan for her birthday party but being hurt and angry, she doesn't speak to him in happy tone. The father further talks about the importance of the date 29th February, which comes once in four years and she thanks him ironically for that. The father tries to motivate her to feel good for herself and “*get on with her (your) life*” if the husband is busy and even the kids don't have time for her. Madhu is silent at her father's suggestion and the father also says hopelessly: “*Shayad ye tumse ab hoga nahi*”. (Perhaps you won't be able to do it now). Madhu is silent again but her father's words are not only challenging but also instill the hope in her to think about her ownself and to get on with her own life giving it a try once more just for her own sake. She is shown to see some drawing sheets that have been used very symbolically by the director as signs of hope in her. The words written there are “*Today*”, “*The beginning*” and “*of rest of your life*”. And Madhu decides to really begin her life afresh, anew, this time for herself only. The song in the background is significant enough to convey her feelings and desires to us. She now aspires to reach new heights; wishes to do what she has never done till now; decides to surrender herself to her dreams and desires and make her life special:

*“Badalon pe paanv rakh ke aasmaan ko chhoo liya
Jo kabhi kiya na thaa vo aaj maine kiya
Nahi hai koi aarzo paaya hai maine sukoon
Khwaahishon ke haath me saunp di maine zindagi
Khoob hai khaas hai ab khwaab si hai zindagi”*

(I have touched the sky putting my feet on clouds
I have done today what I never did
I have no ambitions and am at peace
I have surrendered my life to desires
This life is good and special just like a dream.)

Happily she wishes herself 'happy birthday' writing it on the mirror, gets ready and comes out of the house.

When the film opens, there is a scene where the husband complains about the newspaper coming late to their house. She tries to ask the newspaper vendor to bring it in time but he doesn't pay heed to what she says. That situation had forced her to vent herself out saying: "*Koi meri sunataa hi nahi hai.*" (No body listens to me.) But now the life seems to start in a manner where she will dictate everything. She knocks down the bicycle of the newspaper vendor and asks him sternly to come to her house at '6.00 a.m. sharp'. The hitherto submissive wife and mother is shown to have authority in her tone and it is symbolic enough to understand her forthcoming life which she is going to live on her own conditions and will.

She goes to shop for herself, buys gorgeous dresses and footwear, and gets her hair done in a stylish manner. There is a complete makeover and she is surprised as well as happy to see herself so gorgeous. Meanwhile Shravan is talking to his colleagues discussing the likes and dislikes of women, in the context of some of their consumer products. There are different opinions regarding that. Shravan calls Madhu to ask about the office file if somebody has come to pick that up. But by that time, Madhu is in her new form and she deliberately calls it a "*wrong number*". Arguing with Shravan, she finally says, "*There is always a first time for everything Shravan.*" This phrase 'first time' is very significant in the context of not only the film but of human relationships in general. Every spoilt situation can be given a chance to set itself right and every person can start things anew according to his/her needs and desires. Madhu however, understands the significance of this 'first time' in her own life. She is shown to even smoke sitting in a taxi, where she ultimately throws the cigarette away. That perhaps is indicative of at least her desire to smoke and its fulfillment which otherwise is usually forbidden for middle class women in our society.

There comes an interesting situation then where on one side, Shravan is discussing with his colleagues the aspirations and ambitions of a middle class house wife; and on the other, Madhu is shown to contradict whatever Shravan assumes for a middle class house wife. There is a remarkable juxtaposition of scenes to show the gap between a man's assumptions and women's aspirations. Very confidently Shravan says:

“Investment karna ho like flat ya bungalow khareedana ho toh ye middle class house wife kabhi bhi akeli nahi jayegi”

(A middle class housewife will never go alone if she has to do some investment, like purchase of a flat or a bungalow.)

The scene shows Madhu stepping alone.

Shravan again says:

“A middle class housewife. How much she would spend on her own?”

The scene shows Madhu in car showroom alone.

Shravan further asks:

“Chalo ab batao maximum excitement kya hoti hai ek middle class housewife ki life me? Movie ticket khareedegi ya apnaa ghar sajaane ke liye flowers ya chhota sa frame khareedegi.”

(Tell me now what is the maximum excitement in the life of a middle class housewife? She will buy movie tickets or flowers or a small frame to decorate her house.)

Madhu is shown to see and touch a brand new red car.

The other scene shows Shravan receiving a phone call from the bank which informs him about a transaction of more than two lakh rupees on his add-on credit card. He is asked if the payment has to be stopped. Shravan tells them not to stop the payment as his wife must be using that money. What is important and interesting to

note here is that Shravan is not able to think beyond a wife's homely role where she does everything only for the family. As he says in the context:

“Nahi, nahi rokna kyon hai? Meri wife hi kar rahi hogi. Kuchh medical bills settle kar sahi hogi ya kuchh online tickets book kar rahi hogi”.

(No, no, Why to stop? My wife herself would be doing this. She must be settling some medical bills or must be booking some tickets online.)

Shockingly Shravan comes to know that Madhu is doing nothing of what he had assumed. She is actually buying a car. An extremely shocked husband is shown to maintain his poise among the colleagues. He calls at home after a while, but since Madhu is not at home, he gets more disturbed. On the contrary, Madhu is shown to drive her new car quite happily. The situation is symbolic of the victory of a common woman, a middle class house wife who has now stepped out of her monotonous and confined house life in her attempt and realization of her right over her own life, her own desires, her own pleasures, her own dreams and more importantly, her capability to fulfill them.

Parallel to the story of Madhu and Shravan, there runs a story of a criminal Raghav Passport who Madhu comes across by chance in a restaurant. Assuming him to be a detective, she gets curious and requests him to allow her to be with him for just one case, for one day. She emphasizes on the importance of the day calling it a *“special day”* for herself. She wishes to do something unique on that day which she must not have done earlier. Although Raghav is shown to be indifferent towards Madhu, but his own insecure situation (as the police is after him) makes him accept Madhu's offer and he sits along with her in the car. Asking Madhu to use him as her protector, he happens to pass the whole day with her. Madhu comes to know various aspects of his personality and character. Despite doubting him in certain situations, she finally feels a peculiar kind of attachment towards him. That can be understood better when towards the end of their time together, she cries to know that Raghav will be going away then.

Shravan however is reminded of the date '29th February' and Madhu's birthday in a certain situation at office. He calls Madhu to wish her but Raghav

answers the phone telling him that Madhu can't talk since she is busy. Shraavan is tense to hear a male voice on Madhu's phone. Even the red flowers he had sent for Madhu at home's address come back since nobody was there at home to receive them. Then one of Shraavan's friends tells him that he had called Madhu but she was busy on another line. That makes Shraavan even more insecure. He calls Madhu's parents to confirm if she is there and comes to know that even her parents are unaware of her whereabouts. Then he calls his kids to ask if they have wished Madhu for her birthday. Kids tell him that they had talked to Madhu and according to them, she was sounding quite happy on phone. Shraavan's insecurity and tension further increases to realize that Madhu is out of home with no information and moreover, she is happy without the family. So it is the same husband who had suggested his wife to be happy a few hours back, but now is feeling insecure at her happiness and perhaps 'extraordinary' daring to be happy without him and even his wishes on her very special day.

While being with Raghav, Madhu indulges into some topics related to women and their life. They again are the issues that perturb any woman like Madhu. For example, the discussion on the sir-name and the change of it which doesn't make any difference for man, as Raghav himself accepts. But for Madhu, it matters "*as a woman*". According to her, the identity of a woman "*is bound to be different*" with different sir-names. So, that matters. Otherwise also, she feels that everything that a woman does matters whereas the rest doesn't matter. The picture she has conceived of life is full of "*parties, picnic, films*", that is, all fun before marriage and then happens marriage like a "*ding dong*", as if a bell, to indicate a significant change in the life of a woman which leads her to a life of "*rules*" to be followed at every step and in every aspect. Raghav, however, talks in different sense regarding marriage, as he thinks positively about a lot of changes in a woman's life after marriage including their clothing, hairstyle, address and even their name. Madhu's words are significant here to understand what change a woman actually desires in her life apart these imposed changes in her life: "*Change laane ke liye ek moment hi to chaahiye hota hai.*" (Just one moment is needed to bring change). She also accepted all changes in her life after her marriage but those changes were in fact smothering for her. And then just 'one moment' of her decision to live life according to her own will, brought all the change in her life and provided her not only empowerment but pleasure also.

Raghav calls Madhu's life good and happy as compared to his own. But that makes Madhu feel hurt as she knows the reality and harsh truth of her own existence. She wishes to convey that just having a big house, an important person as her husband, the kids and the family doesn't necessarily rid a woman of her problems. And she puts before Raghav her identity that changes at every level, ultimately leaving her with no identity and honour at all. Her words even make her cry as they remind her of her 'identitiess identity':

“Mere husband ke liye main ek house keeper hun. Bachchon ke liye aayaa. Aur watchman ke liye doctor. Bai ke liye marriage counsellor. Aur usme fir achchha bhi dikhna hai. Sote hue jaagna hai jaagte hue sona hai. Mai kuchh bhi ban sakti thee, mai kuchh bhi ban sakti hun”.

(I am a house keeper for my husband. A care taker for kids. A doctor for watchman. Marriage counsellor for maid servant. And then I have to look good. Have to be awake while sleeping and sleep while being awake. I could become anything. I can become anything.)

When Madhu is in car, returning back with Raghav, Shravan calls her and the conversation that follows is interesting to understand the helplessness of the so-called 'Mr. Clever' and the happiness of Madhu who is now living life following her own wishes:

“Shravan : Tum ho kahaan?

Madhu : Nikalee thee aise hi.

Shravan : Tumhara phone out of reach kyon aa raha thaa fir?

Madhu : Hota hai na kabhi kabhi.

*Shravan : Madhu, aaj din bhar me ek baar bhi tumhe
mehsoos nahi hua ki apne pati ko phone kar ke
batao ki tumhaara din bhar ka plan kya hai.*

Madhu : Nahi, Nahi laga.

Shravan : I don't believe this.

*Madhu : My phone's battery is really low. Can I call you back? I am
saving this for emergency. Bye.”*

(Shravan: Where are you?)

Madhu : I had come out just like that.

Shravan: Why was your phone out of reach then?

Madhu : It happens sometimes.

Shravan: Madhu didn't you feel at least once in the whole day that you may call your husband and tell your plan for the day?

Madhu : No, didn't feel.

Sharvan : I don't believe this.

Madhu : My battery is really low. Can I call you back? I am saving this for emergency. Bye.)

The concluding words of Madhu here put before us the picture of an empowered wife who is neither dependent nor concerned about the husband. She doesn't even feel like wasting the battery of her phone by talking to the husband and wishes to save that rather for emergency. It is obvious that 'husband' is no emergency and can be taken care of later. Moreover, he perhaps doesn't need any care also being himself 'Mr. Clever'.

Raghav finally asks Madhu to stop the car as he needs to go then. Madhu had started feeling a kind of emotional attachment to Raghav but then she has to accept the reality also. Coincidentally Madhu had come to know that it was Raghav's birthday also on the same date. So she wishes Raghav a happy birthday before he gets down the car. The next scene shows her moving towards the party venue which Shravan has arranged for her. She is in a black saree looking gorgeous. She passes by Shravan with complete indifference. Shravan is in a shock to see her so and finds himself unable to speak to her. Madhu gets busy in party although remaining silent most of the time. Shravan's situation is so critical due to Madhu's silence and indifferent attitude that he is forced to say to his friends: "*Can I borrow my wife for a minute?*" Madhu comes along and again the conversation between them is significant to understand Madhu's empowered state of mind. Now she is able to appreciate frankly her own looks, deny any unwanted suggestion by Shravan and even refuse to tell Shravan about her day's journey:

“Shravan: Khud ko dekha?”

Madhu : I am looking hot.

Shravan : Aisa lag rahaa hai ki diamond shape waala....

(referring to her blouse)

Madhu : Mai tumse pooch nahi rahi hun.

Shravan : Aisa lag rahaa hai ki is ladki ko pehli baar mil rahaa hun.

Madhu : Aaj ya college ke baad pehli baar?

(The words indicate the role of marriage in their life)

Shravan : Hmm. Right....Mai thodaa nahi zyaada hi pareshaan ho gaya thaa ki tum kahaan ho etc. etc.

Madhu : Bataane se tumhaari ye etc feeling kam ho jayegi?

Shravan : Mat batao. Tumhare apne secrets hone chahiye. That makes u more exciting.”

(Shravan : Have you seen yourself ?

Madhu : I am looking hot.

Shravan : I feel that diamond shaped one.....

Madhu : I am not asking you.

Shravan: I feel as if I am meeting you for the first time.

Madhu: First time today or after college?

Shravan : Hmm. Right I was a bit more disturbed regarding where you were etc. etc.

Madhu : Will your etc. feeling go if I tell you?

Shravan: Don't tell. You should have your secrets. That makes you even more exciting.)

Madhu turns to go and Shravan holds her hand. Caressing her hand, he, however, says: *“But that still matters. Happy birthday.”* So what matters for Shravan even towards the end is not respect for Madhu's privacy, but his possession and right on Madhu as his wife. Madhu doesn't reveal her secrets however. There is a news on TV regarding Raghav Passport and his surrender to the police and also his decision to quit the life of a criminal and begin life afresh. Shravan is bothered less about Raghav's news and more about his friend Jai and the share market. The films ends

with the family happy together. But before the end, Madhu's words are important even though ambiguous when she says, "*Bahut Kum logon ko risk par vishwaas karnaa aata hai*". (Very few people know how to trust risk).

If we interpret these words in the context of Madhu herself, it becomes clear that as a simple housewife, she herself had taken the risk of stepping out of the house alone, purchasing a car alone and then spending the whole day with a complete stranger. It is being called 'risk' since an ordinary housewife who responsibly takes care of the whole household and family is usually so dependent on the husband that she can never think of her own life on her own terms. To take her own decisions is a big risk for herself as she is never allowed to trust her own self. Even Shravan in the beginning narrates to Madhu the story of a lizard that reveals his patriarchal mindset to us which proves that a husband doesn't acknowledge what a wife does and what she can do for others, as well as her own self. But Madhu's monotonous life and unacknowledged moments force her out of her identitylessness (her father being the agent to push her) and she takes the risk to step alone to not only feel but also realize and construct what she actually is and what she can be. Her own words "*Change lane ke liye ek moment hi to chahiye hota hai*" (Just one moment is needed to bring a change) don't remain just the words. They mark and prove their worth and we can see Madhu on her birthday, ready talking a new birth where she stands bold, decisive, frank, assertive and empowered as a wife, there by boomeranging on Shravan's own suggestion "*get alive*". Madhu is 'alive' and happy, very importantly, for her own self.

The Bold Beloveds

For the role of beloved, *Lajja* (1991), directed by Rajkumar Santoshi is the first film I am going to take up. The story of *Lajja* has already been discussed in the section on the wife's role. My focus presently is on the character of Janki, played by Madhuri Dixit, for her role of a bold beloved. She lives boldly, loves boldly, accepts her pre-merital pregnancy boldly and on being ditched by her lover, leaves him also quite boldly. She believes in her own respect as a woman and is not ready to succumb to her lover's male chauvinistic attitude.

Janki is the lead heroine of a drama company owned by Purushottam (Teenu Anand). We see her in actually the journey of Vaidehi. (the main protagonist of the film who too, is struggling to save her child along with her self-respect as has already been mentioned in the section on wife's role) Janki comes to know about Vaidehi's pregnancy and tells her that she herself is two months pregnant. Before Vaidehi is able to ask any thing about Janki's husband and family etc., Janki herself tells her "*Mangal sutra aur sindoor! Abhi shaadi nahi hui meri. Agle maheene ho jayegi*" (The mangalsutra and vermilion! I have not yet got married. Marriage will take place the next month.)

So Janki has been shown to be quite bold as to confess her pre-marital pregnancy. Moreover, she enjoys her state and is confident also of getting married to the man who is the father of her yet-to-be-born child. The situations however, take a turn as we move ahead with her story.

Purushottam is a flirt by nature and tries to trap Janki by bringing precious gifts for her. Once he brings a necklace for her which she refuses and also tells him that she does not like such advances and favours. He is jealous also of her lover Manish (Samir Soni) and abuses him due to his own frustration of not being able to achieve Janki. He tries to even blackmail Janki on the ground of the contract she has signed with him: "*Ab tujhe meri taal pe nachna hoga*" (You will have to dance to my tunes now.) but Janki is bold enough to call him "*Ai purushottam*" (Addressing Purushottam impolitely) and on being ask for not using "*ji*" (a sign of respect) with his name, her daring reply is :

"Kat gaya. Uttam to tu kabhi thaa hi nahi, zyaada bak bak ki to purush bhi nahi bachega. Are bijli hain ham bijli. Kisi ki taal vaal par nahi naachti balki mere tadakne se ache- achchhon ke taal betaal ho jate hain"

(It has got cut. You were never good and will not remain even 'man' if you speak much. I am thunderbolt. I don't dance to anybody's tunes. It's others rather who lose their tunes when I thunder.)

Purshottam's ego is hurt by Janki's harsh words and he plots against her and is successful in creating doubt in the mind of Manish faking his own intimate relation

with Janki. Manish starts doubting Janki even for the child she has conceived and is not ready to believe that he himself is the father of that child. His behavior starts reflecting his indifference for Janki and he announces that he will marry Janki but without the child. This is what hurts Janki to the core but she makes it clear that she would not go for abortion which otherwise she would have gone for Manish's sake but only when Manish had not doubted her. For her, her self-respect is of prime importance:

“Baat mere charitra ki hai, mere atma-samman ki hai”.

(It's a matter of my character, my self-respect.)

Manish wants the evidence that he is the father of the child Janki is pregnant with, but Janki has her reply: *“Aaj pareeksha use deni hogi ... vo apnayega toh is bachhe ke saath, nahi to nahi.”* (Today he will have to face the examination...He will have to accept me with this child otherwise not at all.)

Immediately after this episode in her real life, she has to go for the stage show where playing Sita, she has to appear for *agni-pareeksha* (trial by fire), and Manish is playing Ram there. The episode on stage is remarkable for its subversion of the whole myth and concept of *agni-pareeksha*. Ram in the drama episode says very boastfully that he has saved Sita from the clutches of Raavan for proving his own bravery and preserving the honour of his family:

“Apna paraakram siddh karne ke liye, sadaachar ki raksha aur Raghukul vansh par lage kalank ko mitane ke liye.”

(To prove his bravery, for the preservation of morality and to remove the accusations on the Raghukul family.)

Nowhere comes the mention of saving Sita for her sake or even his own sake, to achieve her as his wife or life partner. Laxman tells Sita that Ram is in agitated state of mind on which she expresses her surprise, as she feels it should be rather 'she' who should be angry, as it is her chastity and character that has been questioned :

“Sawaal mere charitra par uthaa hai, baat mere atma samman ki hai”

(The question has been raised on my character, it's a matter of my self-respect.)

She holds rather Laxman responsible for all her agony. He cut the nose of Shurpankha and Sita became the sufferer for no fault of her own. Raavan trapped her to actually trap Ram. When Ram questions her referring to social norms, she daringly asks him: "*Aapne mujh se vivaah kiya thaa ya samaaj se?*" (Had you married me or the society?) and also tells him very clearly that she does not bother society at all. She reminds him of her duties as a wife that she has always fulfilled for him and feels hurt that he still doubts her chastity. This Sita is further bold to even challenge the bravery of Ram as she claims to have killed Raavan in Ashok Vatika itself there by destroying his will power and confidence:

"Maine akele hi haraa diyaa thaa use Ashok Vatika mein, uska manobal aur atma-vishwaas tod kar."

(I alone had made him lose by dismantling his mental strength and self-confidence.)

According to her, Ram did not commit any act of bravery. He only killed an already dead man. She says to Laxman ironically: "*Mare hue ko maar giraaya yudh-kshetra me aapke paraakrami bhai Sri Ramchandra ne.*" (Your brave brother Mr. Ramchandra killed in the battle field an already dead man.) She even says that Ram would have been easily defeated had she followed Raavan's wish. And on being blamed for her chastity and honesty, she asks angrily :

"Mere saahas, dhairya, vishwaas, prem ka yahi fal mil raha hai aaj ki bhari sabhaa mein mera apmaan, mera parityaag?"

(Am I getting this result for my courage, trust and love that I am being so humiliated and discarded publically?)

She is asked to enter fire to face the trial for the confirmation of her chastity but she refuses primarily and then says that if it was so necessary then Ram also should face the same trial as he also had stayed without Sita and asks Ram (Manish) to accompany her in the trial by fire.

The crowd is shown to be furiously agitated. People imbibing the age-old cultural beliefs have become so accustomed to see Sita facing the trial by fire that they are unable to digest the boldness of Sita who can even refuse the *agni-pareeksha*. Back stage is shown the agitation of Janki who tears away the tickets for Delhi that she had got arranged for herself and Manish to go and get settled there after her last stage show according to the contract. Her outburst is natural in her situation of being a woman who despite all her virtues is questioned just because she is a woman. She is expected to follow man's desire in all possible manners and forms if she wants her respect to remain intact. Otherwise it is very easy for the man and the whole society to call her characterless, the moment she expresses what she herself feels and desires:

“Sab mard ek jaise hote hain. Jo baat inke kaanon ko achhi lage, jo baat inke mann ko rijhaaye, vahi bolte raho toh sar par baitha kar pooja kareinge, kahenge devi hai. Aur jis din apne mann ki baat keh di to kahenge kulta hai, charitra-heen hai.”

(All men are alike. If we keep on speaking what sounds good to their ears and what feels good to their heart, they will pamper us and call us goddesses. But the day we speak our hearts out, they will call us adulterous and characterless.)

Vaidehi has been with her during all this and she appreciates Janki for her daring:

“Kaash Sita ji ne bhi yahi kiya hota jo tumne aaj kiya hai to koi bhi mard aurat ki agnipareeksha ki maang nahi karta.”

(I wish Sita also would have done what you have done today. Then no man would have dared to demand the trial by fire.)

Janki gives a damn to menfolk if they are not ready to understand and honour the importance of women in their lives:

“Bhaad mein gayi ye mard jaat. Baap banane ka darjaa hum unhe dete hain aur woh humare sar par khade hokar naachate hain.”

(Let this race of men go to hell. We give them the status of becoming fathers and they exploit us.)

While Janki and Vaidehi are talking, the spiritual leaders outside are shown to be leading the agitation against Janki. Everybody is against her. They blame her for violating the “*dharma*” (religion) but she is not ready to accept that blame as she feels that she has only raised a question that women from ages have not been able to pose despite always feeling the agony and the angst over the same:

“Maine sirf ek sawaal uthaaya hai jo sadiyon se aurat ke mann mein ubal rahaa hai.”

(I have only raised a question that has been tormenting women since ages.)

She is asked to accept her fault and follow society’s demands or else she will be declared ‘mad’ and will be sent to mental assylum. The director has put this situation very realistically, showing on the one hand the furious conservative crowd trying to suppress the true voice of a woman and on the other, the same woman who is not ready to get rejected and out-casted. She comes out, gets trampled over and is beaten severely by people and as a consequence, gets her child aborted there and then. The scene overtly shows the victory of society over a woman’s desire and honour but seen deeply, it is actually the victory of a woman’s voice who is ready to face any and every consequence but is not ready to be subdued by accepting what is wrong. Janki here is victorious as a woman and more specifically as a beloved as she doesn’t allow her lover’s whims and impositions to dominate her real self. She loves him whole heartedly, trusts him blindly, is ready to be with him and adjust according to his comparatively low financial status. But his mistrust on her hurts her and for her, her self-respect is prior to anything else in the world. She loves and respects herself for being a woman and is confident of the capabilities of a woman who can do any thing to protect her honour.

Vaidehi once expresses her desire for a male child seeing her own suffering state as a woman and tells Janki about her wish for her yet-to-be-born child :

“Apni haalat dekh kar to lagta hai ladkaa hi ho. Bechaari ladki!”

(I wish to have a male child when I see my own state. The pitiable girl child!)

And Janki instantly comes ahead to make Vaidehi feel ashamed on calling the girl “*bechaari*”. She suggests her to feel rather proud on herself for being a woman and also recognize her potentialities as a woman:

“Ai, ladki ko bechaari nahi bolne ka. Ye kahinaat ki jitni khoobiyaan hai na, vo sab ladki mein daal di hain upar wale ne. Vo agar apne jalwe par aa jaye na to achche-achchon ko nachaa deti hai.”

(Don’t you call the girl pitiable. The God has instilled in her all the virtues of the world. She makes even the better ones dance once she is in her real self.)

Janki herself doesn’t at all move even a single step backward in any situation. She moves ahead and comes up to set an example for all women to follow what they themselves feel as right instead of blindly accepting and following socio-cultural and religious dictates specified for women.

Purushottam once refers to *Shastras* (scriptures) for the test of the character of woman when he had tried to incite Manish against Janki :

“Jo stri apne ghar ki dehleej paar kar jaaye us stri ke charitra par koi bharosa nahi rehta. Aur vo bhi kalakaar! Jis chehre par choona lag jaye na, vo chehra kabhi kisi kaa vafaadaar nahi hota.”

(That woman’s character can never be trusted who crosses threshold of her home. And then the artist! The face that is coloured once can never be loyal to anybody.)

This is what generally happens in our families and society, but Janki leaves all this behind, including her own love for Manish for the sake of her own self-respect. Facing all the trials and tribulations of society, suffering all the agony alone, she ultimately comes up victorious and towards the end of the film, we come to know about her status and identity as a famous and reputed actress and dancer who performs stage shows. The same stage provides her a respectful identity which had once

rejected and even punished her for not performing according to society's demands. Thus with all her courage, grit and determination, she is able to be herself, to love herself and respect herself for being a woman to follow what she as a woman feels and wishes, and not what people and society prescribe for her.

Cheeni Kum (2007), directed by R.Balki is the second film taken up for the role of beloved. *Cheeni Kum* is the story of Buddhadev Gupta (Amitabh Bachchan). Buddhadev is the 64-year old chef and owner of London's top Indian restaurant, 'Spice 6'. He lives with his 85-year old mother, (Zohra Sehgal) who is quite feisty for her age, and his only friend is a 9-year old girl Sexy (Swini Khara) who lives in neighbourhood. Buddha is an arrogant, ego-centric, pompous man who has only one passion in life—cooking. He is a confirmed bachelor who has never been in love until 34-year old Nina Verma (Tabu) walks into his restaurant and life. Nina is a beautiful and charming Indian woman. She is cool, calm, quiet and always smiling, but independent and strong willed. The two persons extreme in age, character, and attitude meet and fall in love. They decide to get married, and, like any Indian man, Buddha respectfully comes to ask her father for her hand. Nina's father, Omprakash Verma, (Paresh Rawal) is a true Gandhian, living in Delhi. Here Buddha faces a problem and the main problem is that Buddha is older than Nina's father. The father with a conservative mindset cannot allow his daughter to marry a man of her father's age and even elder than him. A lot of situations arise due to this conflict. Nina even gets rude with her father when all her logics fail to make father consent to this marriage. Buddha also feels irritated in some of those situations and finally leaves the place hopelessly when the father is not ready to finish the fast he has observed to make Nina consent to his wish. The rigid father turns soft finally and allows the daughter to go and marry the man of her choice. Meanwhile Sexy passes away. Buddha gets severely disturbed at this loss but Nina arrives to console him in those moments of distress and the film ends with the whole family sitting together, having food and discussing about some cricket match at Lords, London for which any two of them will go and it is obvious that the parents will go as they are more fun loving and Buddha and Nina enjoy their desperate willingness to go for those cricket matches.

The film opens with a scene where Buddha is instructing his employees about how to be the best. He is shown to be a tough, strict and blunt master who is at the

same time an egoist and a perfectionist also. His obsession for perfection has made him successful also but then arises a situation which is quite different for him to digest. A customer named Nina comes to his restaurant and orders *Hyderabadi zaafrani pulao* (A variety of cooked rice) but instantly sends the plate back after having tasted it. The reason she gives for that rejection is that the *pulao* has ‘sugar’ in it which should not have been there. Buddha takes it as insult and going to her table says that either she has not eaten the real *Hyderabadi zaafrani pulao* or else she should tell him the recipe. His attitude shows no sign of politeness or confession of the mistake on his part. Nina remains silent and goes out. The next day the same waiter comes inside the kitchen with a plate of *Hyderabadi zaafrani pulao* but this time it is the one that Nina has sent for Buddha. And she is shown to go back immediately. It is a remarkable instance of a man’s ego battered so severely by a woman who has not even confronted him verbally. Nina does it all very quietly. Buddha comes back to the kitchen and verifies and comes to know that it was actually the fault of one of his chefs who had mistakenly put sugar in the *pulao* in place of ‘salt’.

The beginning episode is enough to put before as the character of Nina who is and will remain (throughout the film) a bold and straightforward woman who is empowered enough to assert herself on any front. When Buddha meets her and there is a reference to pulao, she straight forwardly asks him: “*Aham ko chot lagi?*” (Have got your ego hurt?) Buddha tries a lot to say sorry but is unable to, as he is not actually used to use this word due to his egoist attitude. When he sits with Nina, he is serious enough to know about her, her family and more importantly for her reason to be there in London. He guesses on his own that she must have come there to cope up with some of her personal tragedy. On that, Nina’s reply is quite on open one, to reveal her personality further that she is not a woman to be subdued by any such tragedy that Buddha is assuming of:

“Agar koi personal tragedy, jaise toota rishta hua bhi hai to mai yahaan kyon hun! Vo toote hue risthe ka doosra hissa, vo hoga no yahaan.”

(If there has happened any personal tragedy, for example, any broken relationship, then why should I be here! He: the other half of that relationship should have been here.)

Buddha was not expecting this reply from a woman. So with his patriarchal mindset, he simply instructs Nina not to possess such ego: “*Ego auraton ke liye achchha nahi hota.*” (Ego is not good for women) And on Nina’s retort “*Aur aapke liye theek hai?* (And is it good for you?), he defends himself explaining that he is not getting egoist.

In another situation, Nina goes to restaurant and saves the chef Babu’s job, who was about to be fired by Buddha for his fault of putting sugar in place of salt. According to Buddha, Babu’s irresponsible behaviour could become the cause of ill repute for his reputed restaurant. There Nina’s logic is that Babu should be forgiven as all the ‘blame’ should come to the owner only if he has always gathered ‘praise’ in his name for all the hard work accomplished by his workers. So if he is entitled to get appreciation as an owner, he should be ready to accept the blame also for the same. Babu therefore, should not be fired just for one mistake of him that was actually not a deliberate one also. This incident again shows Nina as an assertive woman who is aware of not only her own rights but others’ also, and is also bold enough to speak herself out for the benefit of others.

Nina is intelligent enough to understand even the psychology of men. One friend of hers named Shalini (Kanwal Toor) refused to marry her boy friend Jason (Nathan) for the reason that he doesn’t give her the sufficient time. What is important here is that she refuses not actually to refuse but does it with a belief that Jason will fall into the line once she gives him a jolt by her refusal, and then she will marry him, “*Tu nahi janati in mardon ko – Jab tak jhatka na lage, line par nahi aate*” (You don’t know these men. They don’t come to the line unless they are shaken severely).

Nina resists her friend’s decision but Shalini doesn’t listen to her advice. A few days later, Jason tells Shalini that even he doesn’t want to marry her as he has found now another girl friend. Shalini again argues with Nina in that situation when Nina reminds her of the warning she had given her already, regarding her relationship with Jason. Shalini makes fun of Nina’s understanding of men’s psychology. “*Tune*

mardon ki psychology me kya Ph.D kiya hai? (Have you done Ph.D in men's psychology?) and Nina's patient reply is that she doesn't feel any need to do any research for such a small thing: "*Itni chhoti si cheez ke liye Ph.D. ki kya zarurat hai!*" (What is the need to get Ph.D. for such trivial a thing!) So Nina's statement reveals to us that men's psychology is not a big issue for her and she understands it as just a common and ordinary aspect of her overall understanding of life.

Meanwhile Nina and Buddha get close. Nina often visits his restaurant with the excuse of giving back his umbrella and regarding her explanation for the reason to come back to him, she jokingly says, "*Her vajah menu me nahi hoti.*" (Every reason is not there in menu) Buddha is also shown to be happy in her company but he never confesses his feelings to her. One day she invites him for the evening and when they sit together, she initiates the talk:

"Nina : Miss kiya? Mann ki baat ko bol dena chahiye. Bol bhi sakte ho aur pooch bhi sakte ho.

Buddha : Kya?

Nina : Vahi jo aamtaur par aadmi aurat se poochhata hai.

Buddha: Kya poochhata hai?

Nina : Ye to aadmi ko pehle poochhana chahiye.

Buddha: Kya poochhana chahiye?

Nina : Vahi jo ab tak tumne poochha nahi. Kitna time lete ho tum!

Buddha: Kya poochhana chaahiye?

Nina : Zaraa si baat hai. Itna kyon dar rahe ho? Poochh lo na.

Buddha: Tum poochho

Nina : Tum kabhi nahi poochhoge. Main poochh lun?

.... Tumhaara naam kya hai?

Buddha: Buddha. Buddha Dev Gupta.

Nina : Buddha! Aur tum! Itna ahankaar, itna guroor, itna gussa, itna aham aur Buddha!"

(Nina : Missed me? One should speak one's heart. You can speak and you can also ask.

Buddha: What?

Nina : The same which generally a man asks a woman.

Buddha: What does he ask?

Nina : This is what the man should ask first.

Buddha: What should be asked?

Nina : The same which you haven't asked till now. How much time do you take!

Buddha: What should be asked?

Nina : It's just a small thing. Why are you feeling so much scared? Do ask.

Buddha: You ask.

Nina : You will never ask. Should I ask?.... What is your name?

Buddha: Buddha, Buddha Dev Gupta.

Nina : Buddha! And you ! So much of ego, so much of arrogance, so much of anger, and Buddha!

(This is the situation where they get to know each other's names)

So, Nina meets Buddha and expects him to ask and say something to her, regarding his feelings of love for her. Buddha doesn't understand what she is expecting or else he doesn't want to show that he understands. And then Nina asks his name and is surprised to know that his name is Buddha, which is quite contrary to his egoist personality. Buddha is a name in Indian culture that stands for the virtue and tolerance personified. Nina is here straight forward to even make fun of Buddha's name. She knows him as a person with attributes like ego and anger and therefore, is surprised to know that his name is Buddha and doesn't hesitate also to express her feelings of surprise.

In this situation, there is one more thing important to understand regarding the character of Nina. She being a woman, initially expects Buddha to come forward and ask at least her name, and also confess his feelings to her. But when she realizes that he is not going to do that, she doesn't also stay back as an ordinary hesitant woman to only wait for her man to step close. She herself steps forward to ask his name first of all.

After this episode, they again meet in a park and it is one more step forward in their relationship where they get to know each others' age. And we as audience also come to know about the huge gap between their age as Nina is 34 years old where as

Buddha is 64 years old. Buddha is curious enough to ask why she is single at that age and Nina's frank reply is that "*Koi dilchasp aadmi nahi mila*". (I never found any interesting man). Buddha is not ready to accept her truth but then she says for him the same. "*Chaunsath saal aur koi dischasp aurat bhi to nahi mili- Toh!*" (It's 64 years and even you haven't found any interesting woman. So!). Buddha's reply here is that he had got some interesting women but none was as interesting as he himself is.

This conversation again can be interpreted in the light of the social training that men and women receive in our society. A woman of 34 years cannot be expected to stay single without any valid reason. Moreover, it is the single man himself of 64 years who doubts the woman's reason to be single till the age of 34 years. But the woman here (that is Nina) is smart and witty enough to pay the man (that is Buddha) back in the same coin.

They are sitting in a park. Buddha touches the hand of Nina and then she asks him to go and touch a far away tree and come back. When he asks the reason for this, she just says that she would reply once he finishes the task. Buddha literally gets up and runs to touch that tree and comes back. He is panting and Nina, who has thoroughly enjoyed the whole situation says:

"Tumne mera haath chhua to socha check kar lun ki aage kuchh karne ka stamina hai bhi ya nahi."

(You touched my hand and I thought that I should check if you possess the stamina enough to do anything further or not).

Even if she doesn't say anything directly, it is easy to understand what she means to say. So as a beloved, she is frank and open enough to even check the physical stamina of her boyfriend or perhaps the prospective husband. For her, it is an important aspect of the relationship she desires to have with Buddha. It also reveals her boldness to discuss an issue that is considered to be a taboo in our society. Her words reveal that she finds 'sexual relationship' to be an essential part of any man-woman relationship and is confidently desirous of going ahead for it. So she doesn't hesitate to talk about it on her own without waiting for the man to talk on that issue.

Nina and Buddha ask each other regarding marriage and when both agree, it is decided that Nina would talk to Buddha's mother and Buddha would talk to Nina's father for that.

Buddha has got a neighborhood friend. She is a little girl named Sexy who is severely ill with cancer. There is a situation when Buddha is tense over her deteriorating state and as a consequence gets rude with Nina. Buddha as a man wants Nina as a woman to listen to him, to follow him, to share his grief, but is unbothered about Nina's state of mind who too is tense over her father's illness. She wants to go back to see her father and literally jolts Buddha to seek his attention just to tell him that she won't come back to him. It is now his turn to come and talk to her father convincing him for their marriage. Nina is not ready to succumb to Buddha's whims and finally he has to come to Delhi to meet her father.

On their very first meeting, Buddha comes to understand Nina's father as a man of conservative and traditional mindset who has fixed his own roles in life, according to his age. He feels that he has retired from work and has nothing left in life except "*bhajan, bhojan aur bhajji*" (religious hymns, food and Bhajji (a cricket player named Har Bhajan)) The father is only 58 years old as compared to Buddha who is already 64 and moreover, his views on the old age leave Buddha unable to discuss with him the issue of his marriage proposal for Nina. The father talks very hopelessly about the physical state of an old man saying:

"Is umra me shareer second hand ambassador ki tarah hota hai. Kabhi carborator me kachra, kabhi suspension me lafda, baar-baar servicing ke liye jaana padta hai".

(Body is like second hand ambassador in this age. Sometimes the carborator goes wrong and sometimes the suspension is faulty. One has to go for servicing time and again).

Buddha conveys to Nina that he cannot dare to talk to her father. So she herself should talk. Nina conveys to her father her wish to marry Buddha but the father says that he can never allow Nina to marry a man just double her age. His simple logic is that he is the well-wisher of his daughter. Nina tries a lot to convince

her father but he denies and even goes for endless fasting till Nina consents to his wish of not marrying Buddha.

There is an interesting episode to put before us the thinking of an old father who on the one hand claims to be the well-wisher of his daughter, but on the other, refuses to even understand her feelings, her desires and her will to marry a man of her choice. Nina, as a consequence, turns bitter towards her father and the following conversation takes place:

“Father: Main tujhe ye galati nahi karne dunga. Are tere baap ki umar ka hai.

Nina : Nahi, chheh saal bada hai aapse.

Father : Mujhe ye rishta manzoor nahi hai.

Nina : Manzoor! Lekin poochh kaun rahaa hai aapse! Bataa rahe hain aapko.

Father : Theek hai to mai bhi bataa dun. Mere jeete ji ye nahi hoga.

Nina : Toh kab jaa rahe hain aap?”

(Father : I will not allow you to commit this mistake. He is of your father’s age.

Nina : No, 6 years elder to you.

Father : I don’t approve of this proposal.

Nina : Approve! But who is asking you! We are just telling you.

Father : Okay then let me also tell you. It cannot happen till I am alive.

Nina : So when are you going?)

Nina thus gets rude and blunt enough to ask her father when he is going to die. Her words come as a shock to the father who could never expect his daughter to be so rude to him, simply at the unfulfillment of her desire. Nina too feels guilty at her behaviour after a while, yet she is not ready to succumb to the father’s wish. She leaves no effort to convince him and make him agree for her marriage with Buddha. She gives the example of her own mother’s life span thus trying to convince her father that nobody has control over human age. The father is very much bothered about the age of Buddha who Nina wants to marry but Nina is very clear about her decision to

marry a man she loves. She is not willing to give any after-thought to that man's age as she talks to her father in this regard:

*“Father : Main tere baare me soch rahaa hun. Vo kitna
jeeyega? Paanch saal, das saal?”*

*Nina : Papa, Mai Buddha ko janati hun. Uski umar ko nahi.
Kisi ke saath pachaas saal bina pyaar ke jeena se to
achchha hai ki mai uske saath paanch ya das saal
jeeyun jisse main pyaar karti hun”.*

(Father : I am thinking about you. How much would he live?
Five years, ten years?)

Nina : Father, I know Buddha and not his age. It's better to
live five or ten years with a man I love than living
lovelessly with somebody for fifty years.)

The father however, remains adamant at his decision of not allowing Nina to marry Buddha. After all the possible arguments and requests to win the consent of the father, Buddha goes away from the scene. Nina follows him but the father holds her hand and she is not able to go. Despite all her blunt replies and bold words to her father, she still wishes to wait for the father's consent. She does it all due to her feelings of love and respect for the father. Otherwise we have seen that she is neither hesitant nor docile or submissive. After a while, the father realizes his own fault of getting adamant at the cost of his own daughter's wish. He leaves her hand allowing her to go, saying *“Tu full vegetarian mat bananaa”* (Don't be full vegetarian) which in itself means the consent to marry Buddha.

Nina thus appears in the film as a bold and eloquent woman, not only as a daughter who takes her own decision regarding the important issue of marriage, but more importantly as beloved, who from the very beginning is very particular about her choice. She is quite open and assertive in all matters. Her understanding of male psychology and male ego in particular further helps her in asserting herself as a beloved who is frank enough to express not only her feelings but decision also, to her lover. As a beloved, she can not be taken for granted to follow her lover's wishes and choice. She comes up to express her love but never denies her own self, just to please

Buddha. If she decides and comes forward to marry Buddha against her father's decision, it is her choice, as an individual, and if she resists marrying Buddha due to her father's resistance, it is again her own choice and decision as an individual to honour her father's wish.

The Dauntless Daughters

For discussing the daughter's role, I have taken two films. *Lajja* (2001), directed by Rajkumar Santoshi is the first film that portrays a daring daughter before us. (The storyline of this film has already been discussed in the previous section on the wife's role.) *Lajja*, the story of three Sitas is important to understand women in their different roles. All the three women given their names after the name of Sita have not been portrayed merely as the submissive Sita who suffers silently. They suffer certainly because of the orthodox norms of society and the conservative dictates prescribed for women, but not in silence. So far as the daughter in this film is concerned, it is Maithili (Mahima Chawdhary) who speaks up and protests against what she finds wrong. She negates and neglects what is imposed on her. And she asserts herself in order to establish her identity and honour as a woman who deserves very well the honour of being a daughter too.

Vaidehi (as mentioned in the earlier section on wife's role) is the main protagonist of the film and is victimized for her non-submissive attitude. Her situation both at her husband's as well as father's place forces her to flee away. A man by chance saves her who himself is a thief for the time being, as his situations have forced him to be so. He asks her:

"Kya chura ke bhaag rahi ho?"

(What you stealing away?)

Her reply is:

"Kuchh apna hai jo bacha ke bhaag rahi hun."

(There is something mine which I am protecting by so fleeing away.)

She has to preserve her child and her self-respect too. In order to escape, she joins a marriage procession. The same man meets her there also and their conversation very aptly satirizes the difference marked by society between the bride's and the bridegroom's family. Raju (Anil Kapoor) simplifies for her the simple yet ironical difference between the two:

“Jo haath jode jhuk ke chal rahe honge, vo ladki wale ; jo seena taane akad ke vo ladke wale.”

(The girl's family members are those who would be walking with folded hands and bowed heads; the ones who walk broad-chested arrogantly, are the boy's family members.)

The identity of a bride's father, as told by Raju is also ironically apt:

“Jhuki moochhen, giri kalgi, chere par bali ke bakre wali sthiti fir bhi hothon par muskaan, baat baat par mafi maangta....”

(Bowed moustaches, hats down, the face showing complete helplessness, yet a smile on lips, seeking forgiveness on every small issue...)

These distinctions and identities are actually the realities of our society that the director has tried to put before us, not only to portray them as just realities but very significantly to make us reflect upon the prevailing mindset of society that discriminates in the name of sex so much as to make the woman and her family only more helpless. And in the same context, comes Maithili , the going-to-be-married daughter, who tries a lot to adjust with the fast increasing demands of the bridegroom's parents but ultimately says 'no' to all their demands when they become suffocating for her as an individual, and more importantly as a daughter, who is worried about her father's honour also. She prefers to save her father's honour rather than getting married to a man who doesn't have any say in his family and whose parents are all petty demanding ones, going on demanding endlessly, irrespective of her father's low financial status. She decides to save her father's honour not only as an individual, but as a daughter's father more importantly.

The marriage party which Vaidehi reaches is actually Maithili's. In a short while, it becomes clear that the bridegroom's father is demanding dowry and wants it even before the solemnization of marriage or else he will go back. Maithili's father has been able to collect the money demanded for the dowry but it is fifty thousand rupees less than the stipulated amount. The bridegroom Atul's father refuses to get the marriage solemnized. Maithili overhears all their conversation and see her father's helplessness. Vaidehi and Raju also listen to all this. Vaidehi requests Raju to help Maithili's father but initially he refuses and shows his helplessness as he himself needs the same amount of money for his own job. Then Vaidehi suggests Maithili to talk to her fiancée Atul. But Atul also shows his helplessness to interfere in the matter. Actually in his family, it is the elders who take all decisions and youngsters don't have any say. So it is more his cowardness and less his helplessness that he cannot speak even when it is regarding his own life partner.

In the mean time, something happens and Raju gets his money back from the person who he had given it. He then decides to help Maithili's father and secretly puts that money in her father's bag. This is the same money that he had actually stolen from somewhere to get a job. The man whose money was stolen identifies him and the situation takes a sudden twist. First of all the bride's father is blamed for stealing the money. And when Raju confesses that it is he who had stolen that money, people start blaming Maithili for being alone with a man in her room. Atul's father again gets a situation to demand more money. He offers to have mercy on Maithili by accepting her as his daughter-in-law despite all blames, but he demands fifty thousand rupees extra for the 'ritualistic purification' of the bride whose chastity is doubtful as she was alone with a man for complete one hour. Maithili's father literally begs and requests an extra time of four to five days to manage that extra money.

There comes Maithili as the daring daughter asking her father to say 'yes' to Atul's father. Her words here are remarkable as they express not only her angst but also the petty mindset of people who first question a woman's chastity and then condone it also on account of money:

“Aap haan keh do papa. Koi ek ghanta baith kar gaya aur pachaas hazaar chhod gaya. Do baitha lungi, ek lakh ho jaayenge. Aap inse pooch lijiye, aur chaahiye to char paanch baitha lungi.”

(You say ‘yes’ to them father. Somebody sat for an hour and left fifty thousand. I’ll have two men with me, it will be one lakh then. Ask them if they want more and I’ll have four to five men to be with me.)

Everybody is shocked at her daring and she is ordered to be silent. Atul’s father repeats his pet phrase addressing Maithili’s father:

“Nekchand, shaadi karni hai ya uth jaayen.”

(Nekchand, do you want marriage to be solemnized or we should get up.)

“Uth jaayen” becomes a symbolic phrase in the context of marriage which means the condition put by the bridegroom’s father and expected to be fulfilled by bride’s father in the form of his favourable reply to the bridegroom’s father. But what follows then is a remarkable situation. A voice is heard *“Uth jao”* (Get up), but this time it is not Atul’s father’s voice. It is rather Maithili’s voice who literally shouts at Atul’s family, saying:

“Maine kahaa uth jao. Baahar niklo fauran. Abhi, aur isi waqt.”

(I said, Get up. Get out of here at once. Now and this very moment.)

Atul tries to emotionally pressurize her calling himself her husband. She snubs him blatantly saying:

“Chup chhachhunder , tere jaise pati se to sati hona achha hai.”

(Be quiet you mole, it would be better to sit on a pyre rather than having a husband like you.)

Her father is shown in shock still thinking and worried about who would marry her after this episode. The same daring Maithili again becomes weak before her father’s grief and starts blaming herself for every happening. And then her auntie (Dina Paathak) comes forward to console her and appreciates what she has done. Keeping all the blame with herself as that generation of women who never spoke against injustice and only suffered in silence, the auntie, in fact, works as an

empowering agent and frees Maithili- a daughter, of all the guilt she feels for being the cause of agony for her father:

“Na beti na. Ye tera kasoor nahi hai. Ye toh humaara kasoor hai. Tune jo aaj kahaa, tune jo aaj kiya, agar apne waqt me hum kehte, hum karte, toh tujhe ye din dekhna na padta. Beti, ho sakta hai tujhe takleef sehni pade lekin ladki jaat ko himmat milegi, badi himmat milegi. Shaabaash beti, shaabaash”.

(No daughter, no. It's not your fault. It is our fault. What you said today, what you did today- had we done this in our times, you would never have faced the situation which you faced today. It is possible that you may have to suffer for this but it will provide a lot of strength to the race of women. Bravo! Daughter. Bravo!)

In a very balanced form, the director has portrayed the scene showing the real picture of society with the problem, the suffering, the solution and the daring ; yet again the upcoming fear and guilt but ultimately the victory of the individual (here the daughter) over the water tight customs and mindset of society. The scene of the rising sun immediately afterwards serves the purpose of showing and instilling hope in the minds of women.

For the daughter's role, ***Kya Kehna (2000)***, directed by Kundan Shah is the second film taken up. The story revolves around the spunky and independent Priya Bakshi, (Preeti Zinta), the only daughter of a middle class family that lives in a town in the Himalayan foothills. When Priya graduates from her boarding school, she returns home, joins college afterwards and there falls for a dashing local boy, Rahul (Saif Ali Khan). Against the strenuous objections of her family members, who are well aware of Rahul's reputation as a Casanova, Priya begins a passionate affair with him. Defying all socio-moral codes, she gets physically involved with Rahul and predictably becomes pregnant. She meets Rahul's family with her family members but all of them are badly humiliated by Rahul's mother and Rahul also is not willing to marry Priya. Unsurprisingly, she is rejected by the whole family in the name of 'family honour' and is literally pushed out of the house. Priya, who had been the apple of everyone's eye, is stunned at the realization that she has been exiled not only

by her own family, but by her whole community also. She faces a lot of problems in the situation but after some time, the family decides to take her back. She starts living with her family, attends the college also in her state of pregnancy but has to face a lot of painful and harassing remarks by the people. She tolerates everything and then a play is staged in the school where she watches with her family a thinly-disguised performance of her own predicament in which the expectant protagonist, played by her best friend, takes her own life, as is considered 'proper' to restore the family's honour. This public shaming orchestrated by Rahul's mother is devastating to Priya but she doesn't lose heart. She requests to get the stage, is allowed and then she delivers a lengthy speech that moves the audience and Rahul as well who gets up to clap first. After that the pregnant Priya is not only welcomed by everyone in the college but also taken special care of. Finally she gives birth to a baby girl. She is faced with the marriage proposal from both Rahul and Ajay and she chooses Ajay thus surprising her own family and in fact shocking Rahul and his family. The film ends showing Priya as a strong-willed character who again makes her own choice and moves forward.

To understand the whole journey of Priya, it is important to see the whole story from the beginning. The film begins in the dining room of the house very symbolically showing a chair reserved for the daughter of the house, and even the sons are not allowed to use that. It is important to understand (which the film reveals later) that the reservation is not for a woman who needs that as a benefit or extra favour but because she deserves the very place for her, for all her strengths, boldness and the capacity to assert herself when needed. The next scene in her school makes the picture more clear for us as audience.

One of her classmates becomes a victim to the molestation attempted by the vice principal of the school. The girl escapes somehow but Priya hearing all that says that she would have slapped the man instead of escaping without asserting herself. The friends and classmates around her try to put their opinion on that incident saying some things are better said than done. But Priya is not ready to approve that and accepts a challenge in that situation to slap the vice principal on the day of the annual function of the school. Although she has been shown to be a bit hesitant to do the same but she is provoked by her friends to dare and then she literally slaps the vice

principal in that function in front of everyone. Exposing his intention of molesting a girl, Priya not only puts her foot down to raise a voice against ‘sex-abuse’ – one of the prevalent social evils, but also makes clear her own say on the life to come, telling all that she has chosen to assert herself against all injustice and will do the same in future also :

“Maine vahi kiya jo mujhe karnaa chaahiye tha aur aage bhi vahi karti rahungi, zindagi bhar.”

(I have done what I should have done and will do the same in future.)

The vice principal is dismissed there and then which in itself proves a victory of ‘voice against evil’.

She has to come back home after the school session is over but there happens a land slide and her train gets late by eight hours. Her father and friend are shown waiting for her and when the friend asks her father to go to pick her up from the place where she might have got struck (due to the land slide), the father tells him that Priya is not only a very bold and brave girl but a determined one also and she would definitely reach home the same day despite all barriers and problems:

“Tum to Priya ko jaante ho. Land slide ho ya earth quake, Priya aaj yahaan zaroor pahunchegi, tum dekh lena.”

(You know Priya. She will definitely come back today only, irrespective of any land slide or earthquake.)

And after a lot of struggle in her situation, Priya is shown to come back thus proving her father’s words.

Priya comes in the contact of a stunt man Rahul who belongs to a rich family. He is a pampered and spoilt boy and also a big flirt who possesses no feelings of love and respect for girls but knows only how to trap them in the name of love. Priya attracts him and he tries to come close to her. Priya’s family warns her against him and she also promises them not to meet him any more. But Rahul plays a game just in order to attract her to his site. He spreads the news about a dangerous stunt he is going to play. Priya goes to the site, is trapped in Rahul’s plan and confesses her love

to him openly, despite being resisted by Ajay (Chandrachud) who is her childhood friend and knows all about Rahul and wants to save Priya from his clutches. She goes with Rahul and even makes love with him. Rahul's motive is fulfilled but Priya is not able to understand that. Her brother sees her with Rahul but she leaves with him defiantly in front of her brother, completely unaware of the consequences of her action.

Before coming back home, she meets Ajay and requests him to support her as she wishes to confess her love for Rahul in front of her family. She tells the family and despite knowing Rahul's reality, they agree if Rahul also decides to be with her. They decide this just for the sake of Priya's happiness. Happily she goes to Rahul's house to convey to him the approval of her parents for their marriage, but Rahul is not at home then and Priya gets humiliated severely by his mother. She however, waits outside his house till he comes back and then takes him to her house. There the mention of 'marriage' makes Rahul irritate as he has never thought about Priya from that point of view. Moreover, he feels that his parents are 'class-conscious' and he himself doesn't wish to marry Priya and even accepts that he has only flirted her. He rather blames Priya to be after him:

“Pyaar mere liye khel hai Priya. Maine apni zindagi me kabhi kisi se pyaar nahi kiya.”

(Love is only a game for me. I have never loved anybody in my life.)

When Priya tells that she has loved him from heart, he even calls it her mistake if she decides to wait and hope for him to come back to her.

A few days later, while singing and dancing in a family function, Priya suddenly faints and the medical examination diagnoses her with pregnancy. Her father and brother go to Rahul's house but in front of the blunt and rude attitude of Rahul's mother, they have been shown as helpless and the honourless, just because they are the father and the brother of an unwed expecting mother. They literally beg before Rahul to help them:

“Beta humaari laaj tumhaare haath me hai. Hume niraash mat karnaa beta.”

(Please don't disappoint us, as our honour is in your hands now.)

Rahul agrees to marry Priya only to give his name to her child, on the condition that he would divorce her the next day of marriage. Badly humiliated by Rahul and his mother, the family comes back and it is decided to get Priya's child aborted. They are left with only this option for saving the honour of their daughter as well as the family. They know the norms and rules of society. They are ready to beg before a man who doesn't respect either them or their daughter. They are ready to go for unborn child's abortion but are not ready to let their daughter go for the child with the same honour that she could have got had she been married to someone.

Priya goes to her room; sees the picture of the baby *Krishna*; hears the symbolic voice "*maa*" deliberately put by the director in the scene to not only valorize the significance of 'mother' in one's life but also 'unwed mother' to take decision according to her own will, thereby discarding the whole burden of suppressing social norms. Priya decides to get bold and refuses to go for abortion, as she desires to give birth to her child. Her father scolds her for her decision but she justifies herself saying:

"Ab mai bachchi nahi hun papa. Mai samajhne lagi hun maa banane ka matlab kya hai."

(I am no more a child papa. I understand what it means to become a mother.)

But she is thrown out of the house along with her luggage and then starts a series of tortures and sufferings for her when her own father supports her struggle not as a companion or a well-wisher, but rather as an enemy:

"Agar tum ladnaa chahti ho na to tumhaari ladaayi yahaan se shuru hoti hai, ghar se"

(If you want to fight really, your fight starts from here, the family...)

All the family is given instructions not to meet her, help her and even talk to her for anything. Bothered about his social prestige more, the same loving and

affectionate father becomes cold and indifferent for the daughter. He goes to the extent of even declaring her dead for him:

“Aaj ke baad Priya is ghar mein kabhi vaapas nahi aayegi. Mar gayi Priya humaare liye.”

(Priya will never come back in this house now. She is dead for us.)

Days pass and the frigid father melts and decides to get Priya back. The mother and the brothers already wishing the same, are happy and welcome the father's decision.

Priya joins the family back and joins the college also in her pregnant state. Society is shown to make fun of her but her family supports her completely. The words of a song in that situation are significant and sufficient to understand the support and honour she gets from her family in those moments of crisis:

“Saamne karenge mil ke chaahe das hon chaahe hazaar.”

(We will face unitedly whether it is ten or thousand to face.)

But as the film moves, it becomes clear that the support from family is not sufficient to prove that a girl is safe and gets respect in the society as well, specially when she has violated the social norms. Here Priya's mistake, according to society is that she has got involved in pre-marital sex with Rahul. Nobody however, is bothered about Rahul's refusal to marry her respectfully. It is Rahul's mother herself who blames Priya rather than accepting her son's mistake. She says for Priya:

“Hadd hoti hai besharmi ki. Khul kar ghoomati hai... Bataaiye kya asar padega iska humaare samaaj par, humaari bahu betiyon par. Kya aane wali peediyon ko yahi siddhant aur yahi aadarsh sikhaana chaahenge?”

(It's the limit of shamelessness. She roams around openly... Just think how it is going to influence our society, our daughters and daughters-in-law! Do we want our coming generations to learn these principles and ideals?)

Rahul's mother considers Priya's behaviour very irresponsible and shameless. So she instigates everybody to take some action against Priya and a play is planned to be enacted at the annual function of college. The story is Priya's story, but not of her courage and bold decision to give birth to her child even before marriage. It is rather planned to humiliate Priya and moreover, to humiliate her family also for supporting her against social code. Priya watches it with her family. Her mother finds herself unable to watch those scenes that are extremely humiliating for the whole family, and she decides to walk out of that show. But Priya wants to watch the complete play and asks her mother also not to go from there. The characters in the play have been shown as the common social beings who are so afraid of the social codes that they are ready to smother their own selves for that sake. The character playing Priya's role confesses the pre-marital sex and pregnancy out of it as a heinous crime. She finds it extremely humiliating for her whole family. She accepts that she has deviated from the prescribed social norms. So she has lost even her own right on her life and that she is left with no other way out except committing suicide and is shown to commit suicide and die. She speaks so:

“Mai jaanati hun mai isi laayak hun. Maine ek aisa paap kiya hai, aisa galat kadam uthaaya hai ki ab mujhe jeene ka koi adhikar nahi. Maine apne maa-baap ko kahin munh dikhaane laayak nahi chhoda. Samaj ke banaaye saare niyam tod daale maine. Isiliye ab mere saamne bas ek hi raasta hai...(and she commits suicide)”

(I know I deserve this. I have committed one such sin, taken one such wrong step that I don't deserve to live. I have left my parents unable to face anybody. I have violated all the rules made by society. So I am left now with only one path....(She is shown to take sleeping pills and commit suicide.))

The father in the play approves of her decision saying that it was the only penance she could do for her act of violation:

“Shaayad yahi uska praayashchit thaa.”

(Perhaps it was her penance.)

Even the police inspector in the play justifies the suicide of Priya saying that whenever somebody dares to violate the social norms, she is left with only one alternative and in case of Priya, it was her penance, that she did by committing suicide. The policeman speaks out of his own experiences:

“Aise bahut se case dekhe hain meine ... magar jab bhi koi samaaj ke niyam todta hai, maryaada ki rekha ka ullanghan kartaa hai, toh sach-much uske paas ek hi rassta bachta hai- praayashchit.”

(I have seen a lot of such cases...but whenever someone breaks the social norms, or violates the line of control, then the person is really left with only one option- penance.)

Priya unable to bear all this any more, requests the college principal to allow her to speak from the stage. Given the permission, she comes to the stage and appreciates the script of the play, the acting done by various characters but mentions her disapproval of the manner in which a social problem has been presented in the play, and most importantly, the end of the play, which shows the girl committing suicide. She tells them that according to her, the girl in the play had not committed any sin. And since she knows it is she herself whose story has been enacted on the stage in the form of that play, she expresses her own feelings and tells the audience that even she has not committed any sin. She loved and loved truly. The only wrong she committed was that she trusted Rahul out of her own her feelings of love and got involved in sexual relationship with him. But even for that, she holds the other person also responsible who acted as her partner and then betrayed her:

“Naatak bahut achchha thaa, bahut achchhi tarah likha gayaa hai, sabne acting bhi bahut achchi ki lekin uske andar ki samasyaa ko ek galat najariye se dekha gayaa hai. Isliye mai is naatak se bilkul bhi sehmata nahi hun Aur khas taur par iske ant seAnt me vo ladki aatma-hatya kar leti hai kyunki use lagta hai usne bhayaanak paap kiya hai lekin usne koi paap nahi kiya. Maine bhi koi paap nahi kiya. Maine pyaar kiya hai. Sachche dil se pyaar kiya hai... lekin haan, mujhse galati ho gayi, bahut badi galati ... lekin iski jimmedaar mein akeli nahi hun. Isme koi aur bhi shaamil hai mere saath.... Lekin usne

jab zimmedaari lene se inkaar kar diya toh mein kya karti, kahaan jaati, kaun sa raasta apnaati?”

(The play was good, has been written well. The acting too has been very good but the problem in the play has however, been seen from a wrong point of view. So I don't agree with this play, and specially with its end. The girl commits suicide in the end because she feels that she has committed a horrifying sin. But she has not committed any sin. Even I've not committed any sin. I have loved. I've loved truly, from heart. But yes I committed a mistake, a blunder. But even for that, I alone am not responsible. Someone else is involved with me. But when he refused to shoulder the responsibility, what could I do? Where could I go? Which path should I've chosen?)

She asks the audience what is her fault. She asks them what path she should have chosen. She tells that for a while, even she had decided to choose the same path of suicide as Priya in the play chose, but she didn't do any such thing because the innocent voice of the unborn child (who wanted to live and come into the world) pricked her conscience.

She is ready to accept all the blames and abuses of the society but is unhappy over the society's attitude who gives a lot of honour to the expecting mother but only if the woman is a married one. To become a mother is supposed be the biggest blessing for a woman but this blessing itself became a curse just because she conceived before marriage and more importantly because the father of the yet-to-be-born child refused to marry her. She expresses her angst over the social approval of the man's attitude of irresponsibility and at the same time, the disapproval of a woman's honour, specially when she alone can not be held responsible for any act of violation of social codes. Priya expresses her bitterness over the society's attitude that doesn't differentiate between a rotten teeth and a living child:

“Aap log chahe to mujhe kultaa kahen, chaahe gandi- gandi gaaliyaan de, lekin aakhir mein hun to ek maa hi Maa banana duniya ka sabse badaa saubhaagya hai. Ishwar ka sabse badaa vardaan lekin sirf phere nahi pade toh yahi vardaan paap ban gaya.

Saubhaagya durbhaagya me badal gayaa aur samaaj ne mere saamne ek hi raasta chhoda jo mere jaisi ladkiyaan majboori mein apnaati hain, ki main apnaa bachcha gira dun, apne jism se ukhaad phenkun jaise koi sadaa hua daant apne jism se nikaal deta hai yaani ki ek sade hue daant aur mere bachche mein koi farak nahi.”

(I am a mother after all, even if you may call me characterless or abuse me severely.....It is the biggest blessing of life to become a mother. The biggest blessing of God.....but the same blessing becomes a curse just because the marriage has not been solemnized. The blessing changed into curse and the society left only one option for me which girls like me adopt under compulsion, which is that I should get my child aborted..... That means there is no difference between a rotten tooth, which is detached from the body, and my child.)

She asks all sitting over there if committing suicide and killing a living embryo thereby is not a sin. She shares her experiences which she felt with the child inside her womb. She was confused over what decision to take regarding the birth of the child and then she heard a voice “*maa*” (mother). It was the voice of a child which came to her refuge and brought her out of all her dilemmas. It is significant to note that the child admits all the evils of society and agonies of human life that she may have to face, yet the child is willing to live, since human life is still beautiful despite all its odds:

“Mera janm ho chukaa hai maa, mai teri kokh me hun, karvaten badal rahaa hun. Sab kuchh dekh rahaa hun... mai jeena chaahata hun, is duniya mein aana chaahata hun Mujhe mat maar maa, mujhe mat maar,”

(I am already born mother. I am in your womb, changing sides. I can see everything. I want to live, I want to come into this world ... Please don't kill me mother, don't kill me.)

So Priya decides to give birth to the child. Concluding her speech, she asks people if she was wrong. Rahul initiates to clap for her and then all the people present there put their hands together in appreciation, which is significant to understand that

her decision stands honoured now. Even Rahul decides to marry her. Although Rahul visits Priya's house, confesses all his mistakes, feels sorry, begs forgiveness and proposes to marry Priya but Priya has become empowered enough to judge her good and bad. In the mean time, she also gets to know about Ajay's soft and loveful feelings for her, as he confesses it to her. Priya gives birth to the baby also which is a baby girl. On seeking forgiveness from her, Rahul realizes that she has forgiven him, but is not ready to marry him.

There is a very significant scene where on her denial to marry Rahul, Rahul's father tries to make her realize that she should not refuse Rahul's proposal as she is the mother of his child only:

“Shaayad tum bhool gayi ho ki tumhari god mein Rahul ki aulaad hai”

(Perhaps you have forgotten that the child in your lap is Rahul's child.)

And Priya is frank and bold enough to tell him that the child belongs to her only, as it is she only who took the decision to give birth to this child, despite all odds. And Rahul has lost all his claims on that child:

“Nahi uncle, meri god mein meri aulaad hai. Ye meri aulaad hai, sirf meri.”

(No uncle, I have my child in my lap. This child belongs to me only.)

Priya's mother also wants her to marry Rahul, as he has now admitted his mistakes. She asks Priya the reason to deny Rahul and Priya refers to her mother's own words where she had expressed the importance of the feeling of respect in the husband–wife relationship, besides the otherwise necessary feeling of love:

“Maa aapne hi to kaha tha ki pati-patni ke sambandhon mein sirf pyaar hi kaafi nahi, ek doosre ke liye izzat bhi honi chahiye. Mai chaahungi ki apne pati ke liye mere dil mein bhi vahi izzat ho jo aapke dil mein papa ke liye hai. Lekin Rahul vo izzat kho chukka hai, hamesha ke liye.”

(Mother, you yourself had said that in a husband-wife relationship, love is not sufficient; the respect for each other is also required. I would like to have the same respect for my husband in my heart as you possess for the father. But Rahul has lost that respect, forever.)

The mother is actually worried about Priya and more about the future of her new born child and asks Priya to think about marriage in regard of the child. Priya is eloquent enough to express her desire and decision to marry but is very clear about who she would marry.

She tells her mother clearly that in her eyes, Rahul has lost all respect and that too forever. So she won't marry him. That is her final decision. She would rather prefer to marry the man who she feels proud of: for being with her always in her time of distress and who has dared to accept her, knowing all about her and the child (who belongs to someone else), and that man is Ajay. The film ends remarkably showing the mental strength of Priya when right in front of Rahul, she asks Ajay if he would marry her.

So Priya, from the very beginning, is a bold girl who always speaks against injustice. She stands for it, not for herself only but for others sake also. Her speech on the college stage regarding society, its norms, relationships of life and society, and the irony of unwed motherhood and her decision in that regard, further prove her mental empowerment. As a daughter, she is bold to move forward in her love relationship with Rahul, thereby violating all the social codes. Even after getting severely betrayed by Rahul and rejected by her own family, she takes a firm decision to give birth to her child in an unwed state. She suffers a lot due to this decision of hers, as she has to face humiliation at every front, yet she doesn't lose courage and her grit and determination to take her own decision and choose her own way of life, despite all odds, take her more forward in life where all her decision and choices stand justified and she is able to get the honour of all. She proves herself to be daring daughter and a wonderful woman.

The analysis of the four important roles of women in the films taken up for this chapter reveal all the women in their 'real' selves sooner or later. Being in their socially categorized roles, they remain very much their feminine selves as the

mothers, wives, beloveds or daughters. What is more important is to observe and note how do they feel and identify themselves in their respective roles. Do they get the due honour and respect for being what they are primarily, which of course involves their status and identity in the role they are in? Simultaneously, it corresponds to their identity as an individual also who needs and desires the approximate space for her own self. Of course, they don't deny and rather accept quite happily all the feminine roles assigned to them. But now what they desire importantly is their identity in these very roles to be redefined, this time, according to their own situations, needs and desires.

Through her formative years and during the socialization process, the woman learns only to submit to various forms of social tyrannies. She learns to be a good mother, a good wife, a good beloved and a good daughter but this expected virtue of 'goodness' in every role actually trivializes her as an individual. She never learns to be a good individual at peace with herself. She never learns to think of her own world of her own interests. Considered to be silent, suffering and stoic, this 'unreal' woman has hitherto been distressingly deified on celluloid. But now the 'reel' women have been shown to come out of the dump of their socio-culturally defined roles. They are no longer the 'pathetic' creatures belonging to the 'home-prisons', thereby smothering their own selves completely in the name of these roles. Till now they have existed in relation to men - as their mothers, wives, beloveds, daughters. But now they want to exist independently with no pre-conceived or pre-defined identities of them. They convey openly their need to be honoured as individuals first and then only they can be expected to fulfill any of the roles assigned to them. They cannot be taken for granted anymore. They thus wish to assert the very vitality of their own selves even within these roles. Bhawna Somaya has rightly written in this context:

“In the process of performing her roles as a mother, sister, wife, daughter or girl friend [the woman of today] most often, no longer forgets the importance of her most vital role...as herself.” [as cited in Bagchi: .cs.jhu.edu/~bagchi/women.html]

These women are not merely the extensions of male egoistical ideas, but true individuals in their own regard. In all their respective roles, they are not mere fictional constructs or one-dimensional figures who are distant from the ordinary, real life

women. They are very much the real women who need their own personhood to be recognized within the domestic space and without too. They are no longer the modest, self-effacing women entrapped in the oversize mantle of 'role-frames'. They recognize their own potentialities and are able to draw upon their own competence and strength. Subverting the stereotypical definitions of woman and her different roles, these women characters have in fact redefined the 'woman'. Thus the normal definitions of the roles have been radicalized and instead of hitherto sacrificing mothers, dutiful wives, submissive beloveds and docile daughters, now stand before us on celluloid- the magnificent mothers, the vociferous wives, the bold beloveds and the dauntless daughters.

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