

Indian Cinema and the Female Experiences: Context of Love and Marriage

Aastha Saini

Research Scholar

Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Recent decades of pioneering work by feminist scholars in women's studies have made us aware of gender and its centrality in shaping social life. Gender is a complex phenomenon. The study of gender has performed the task of explaining differences between women and men and increasingly focused on the dynamics of masculinity and femininity. Gender typically refers to the social process of dividing up people and social practices along the lines of sexual identities. The social restriction like: "Do this", "Sit properly", "Don't laugh aloud", "Behave like a lady", "Be polite" etc., is endless. Amongst these social constricts, the women grow up in India. Most of the parents still being conservative in their values prefer coy and passive girls. Upbringing of Indian girls is very different from the West. Different festivals are celebrated to welcome the birth of a baby boy but contrary to that girl child is not welcomed with same enthusiasm. The distinction of sexes begins with the birth. Happiness, rejoice and family home is affiliated with boy, responsibility burden and respect is associated with a girl. The partiality which begins early takes a different culmination in youth. Things allowed to boys are not permitted to girls. Boys are free to be outspoken and choose between what is good and bad but as girls are concerned they are not even allowed to choose a life partner for themselves. In third quarter of twentieth century, love marriage were considered a taboo. The change came over in 90's and at dawn of twenty first century women are experimenting a lot more with their love lives. Girls feel that their dreams about marriage will come true on meeting their Prince Charming, their idea of love is somewhat like romances in 'Mills and Boons'. The vision of marriage is that it's a bed of roses least realizing that roses are always accompanied by thorns. Cinema being mirror to society presents an authentic picture of society. As far as love is concerned, in Indian society, it brings along with it different manners of courting. Youngsters emulate Hindi film style of courting or perhaps the filmmakers show us what they like to see.

"I kissed her (to make her accepting proposal) but it didn't work. Do you think I should try rape now?" Govinda utters these words in the film Jodi No. 1. (Malati Mathur P 60, Courting: Hindi Film Ishtyle).

"There are the Dharmendras and Govindas who pursue the heroine and pester the life out of her, manhandling her roughly, pulling at her dupatta, punching her cheeks and so on as all the while, the girl tries to get away from this boor who professes undying love as he tries his utmost to practically disrobe her in public. The marvel of this is that the heroine finally succumbs to the hero's dubious charms and is won over with his caveman like antics. Is it any matter of great surprise then that the majority of our male youth appear to think that the way to a girl's heart is to make crude remarks and even cruder gestures? If the wondrously beautiful Aishwarya or

Hema are themselves irresistibly attracted by the Shenanigans that the average Hindi film hero's (or his director's) idea of courtship is a manifestation of what prove then the ordinary girl's next door or on the street or at the bus stop?" (Malati Mathur 60).

The female experience of love is also in relation to man's whims and fancies. The love is more of a show-these days and men believe in public display as it adds to their masculinity. The number of love marriages is outnumbering the arranged marriages in India. The whole concept of marriage is undergoing change, with the legalization of live-in relationship in India girls have also become bold and they prefer to experiment before entering the 'sacred bond'.

Although women are becoming more educated day by day and in the world of cut throat competition where women walk keeping in pace with their male counterparts, there is a large population of females who are still groping in limbo. These mute women may be from influential families-highly educated, smart or from lower stratas of society. Actually, the fact remains the same that India is a patriarchal society. Kalki Kochlin, the celebrated actress who is very vocal about feminist and female experience remarks: "Feminism is not isolating women". "It is wrong perception that feminism and empowerment are isolating women from the world".

"Women cannot Let Fear dictate their decisions".

"If there is any, I think it is about women overtaking (men). I don't think that's right either. Again, the balance will tip the other way".

"Women can't be sidelined forever" "Feminism talks about an egalitarian society-all human are equal, irrespective of their gender". (Kalki Kochin, Hindustan Times, Jalandhar 23.05.2017)

Women have to undergo a kind social training before marriage. There is a pressure from society and parents stick to norms, cultivate womanly skills of cooking sewing, nurturing, patience etc. The right to choose life partner in many cases still rest with parents. Marriages are fixed up, and sometimes bride bidding is done. Grooms pay price for the girls. Naturally, as a consequence the girls are treated as commodities in most marriages. They end up as sexslaves to satisfy lecherous males and their routine oscillates between exploitation and household chores which drains them to such an extent that the question of love or warm companionship never comes into being. Even in rich strata of society, marriages can be business deals. Such bonds are limited to practical working relations. In both the cases women hardly experience any love and happiness. A woman's experience of love, her expectations out of a marriage, her dreams and sexual fantasies are quite different from a man. For a man physical charm, beauty and sex become priority and a woman longs for true love, emotional bonding etc. On becoming a wife, whole world of a girl becomes topsy turvy. She is expected to look after her husband and his entire family, especially in India where families are joint with larger number of members, it becomes difficult for a girl to suddenly become 'superwoman' and fulfill demands of everyone. J.S. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* tenders forcefully:

“Every women (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man. It has not lost the taint of its brutal origin. And this, indeed, is what makes it strange to ordinary ears, to hear it asserted that the inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest”. (J.S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Chapter-I, P 5). It identifies a set of qualities and behaviors expected from females or males by society. The concept of gender was adopted in order to emphasize the social construction of masculinity and femininity and social ordering of relations between women and men.

“Conquering races hold it to be Nature’s own dictate that the conquered should obey the conquerors, or as they euphoniously paraphrase it, that the feebler and more unwarlike races should submit to the braver and manlier. So true is it that natural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural. Englishmen they do feel it unnatural that women should be soldiers. The independence of women seemed rather less unnatural to the Greeks” (J.S. Mill, Chapter-I, P 12).

“Marriage being the destination appointed by society for women, Society, has preferred attain its object by foul rather than fair means: the father had the power to dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers. The church, indeed, was so far faithful to a better morality as to require a formal “yes” from the woman at the marriage ceremony; but there was nothing to show that the consent was other than compulsory; after marriage, the man had anciently the power of life and death over his wife. She could invoke no law against him; he was her sole tribunal and law. The husband was called the lord of the wife he was literally regarded as her sovereign, marriage contract” (J.S. Mill, Chapter-II, P 29)

J.S. Mill expresses the true position of a woman in marriage. Be it western society or Indian society which we aim to discuss the wife is a mere bond-servant of her husband who should be obedient and such position is given by law to her. Many women experience domestic violence and abuse at the hands of their husbands and other family members but they accept it as a part of marriage. Girls are taught to remain mute by their parents and adjust in their new families.

It has often been pointed out that cinema depicts myths about women and femininity, as well as, about men and masculinity. Acting as the announcer of cultural values, media reinforce traditional stereotypes of women as dependent, decorative, passive and subservient and men as independent, powerful, active and superior (Wood). Gender inequalities have a crucial role in the constitution of social inequalities. Some researchers believe that gender inequalities should be analyzed with social class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, identity and age (Bradley). The study of women- men subordination-domination and power relations is a main concern of feminist theory. Women’s position within media power structures and media representation of

women are persistent concerns in every society, because negative stereotyping and lack of female input both reflect and reinforce wider gender inequalities.

History has always been male dominated and nowhere do we find women experiences being glorified. Since ages our history is such, evidently male became the formulator of law and imposed it on female i.e. other, who was supposed to follow the rules. One became the center force while the other remained marginalized, decentered and unrepresented. Men became fortified and women were thrown in peripheries an unknown world where they were treated low and discriminated. This resulted in creating a rift between 'female' and 'male' with discriminating notes of social consciousness, cultural economic, political, psychological ideas, beliefs and symbols as a woman. Men enjoyed the limelight while the woman remained obscure and unseen. Living together under the same roof her world was classified as weak and strong, giver and receiver, high and low, and ruler and subject etc.

Elaine Showalter, a feminist thinker names it as "masculine form" which is "generic, universal, or unmarked, while the feminine form is marked by a suffix or some other variant" (Introduction: The Rise of Gender 1).

One enjoyed the limelight while the other remained unseen and obscure. Her world was gradually classified and labeled as strong and weak, male and female, teller and hearer, giver and receiver, culture and nature, high and low, ruler and subject, etc. while living in the same social and cultural background.

Ideology of the "master narrator" where women is treated as subject in the world of representation by man. Woman is unrepresentable creature here. The way women are portrayed showed supremacy of man over woman and if we keep in our literature it is a saga of "process of domination and subjugation" (Wynne Davies, Marion 550). Women were treated lowly. Their status in society was nothing, being a puppet in hands of their male counterparts and being associated with childbirth and child. Twentieth century feminist attired "Until very lately women in literature were the creation of men" (Grantie and Rainb 82) and men's stature was achieved at the cost of women.

Till now, the beautiful portraits of women were seen through the eyes of man.

She has been presented as a doll, goddess but on the other hand also treated as a prostitute and lowly woman. Men and Women living under same roof, sharing a bed and unequal in the sense that women are regarded as something "edible", a second citizen who is an object was amazement and luxury for men. Women have been treated as objects and things. Commodification of women has been prevalent since ancient times.

In the Book 'The Second Sex', it is written "The situation of woman is that she..... A free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world. Where men compel her to assume the status of the other" (Simone de Beauvoir 13).

Firestone, a feminist thinker remarks in a very pertinent way: “Culture is so saturated with male was that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes” (The Dialect of Sex: The case for Feminist Revolution).

Freud, the psychoanalyst says that femininity is a biological phenomenon and absence of male genitals arouse inferiority complex in women. They suffer from what he calls ‘penis envy’. Freud said women “as weaker in their instincts than men” (598). Different thinkers and scholars are of opinion that men are more dominant, sexually active while women are more submissive expressive and nurturant. Virginia Woolf shows feminine character as an artist and as an individual, “It is only when we can measure the way of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or the failures (Women and Fiction 77).

Arth is a film which deals with such social issue where the female sex has been presented as weak and suffer from marital discord and adultery. Mahesh Bhatt, the famous bollywood director had written ‘*Arth*’ as an autobiography. He was in love with great Diva Parveen Babi and his wife had to live separately. In the film Kulbhushan Kharbanda who is Inder deserts him wife. Pooja is an orphan and she feels orphaned again. She was alone before she met Inder and after Inder discloses his newly found love to her she becomes isolated again. Her friend and her husband boost her morale and guide her but her problems have to be dealt by her single handedly.

Indian society is obsessed with cinema. Films are social mirrors and what is the image of women shown in films? It is first a glamour doll, beautiful girl perched on the high attitude of values and virtue. In the male dominated society, the cinema is naturally male dominated, which caters to mental satisfaction of men. Women in Hindi films are housewives, dutiful mothers; hardworking daughter in laws and this image is the same since 1950’s. The celluloid lady never comes in the ‘centre’ and is always on the ‘margins’ (Derrida). There are only few films which show women the shackles of tradition and treading the path which is less taken. Of the many memorable women characters in films, *Arth* focuses on betrayal of a wife in marriage.

Pooja played by Shabana Azmi is a housewife. She is wife of Inder who is a film writer and director. Pooja was an orphan and always dreamed of having her own house. Inder was still in struggling phase of his career. They kept on changing their residence. Pooja and Inder were married for seven years but their marriage was on rocks. Inder was impressed by famous actress Kavita who showered a lot of monetary benefits on him. Inder got a new house and Pooja was elated. He went on a tour and she became busy in decorating her abode. Her myth of happiness seemed to fade away gradually and finally when Inder disclosed to her about his fondness for Kavita and she collapsed.

In an eminently offensive scene in another recent film- *Kuch Khatti Kuch Meethi* – the wife prepares to leave her husband’s house again after the couple has been brought together by their

daughters after a long period of separation caused by a misunderstanding. The husband watches helplessly as his children urge him to intervene and prevent their mother from walking out on them to return to the independent and comfortable life she has fashioned for herself abroad. So, what then, does the good man do? Does he apologize to her for having doubted her fidelity? Does he persuade her not to go away once again so that they can enjoy their new-found togetherness in the mellow light of middle-age bliss? Nah! As their grown daughters watch breathlessly, this erring husband delivers a resounding slap to his wife after which – wonder of wonders – she falls at his feet sobbing and demanding to know why he didn't use this technique earlier when she left the house all those years ago! Good Lord! Shudder to think of all the gullible males (not to mention females brainwashed by stereotypes) lapping this up as manna from the heavens and applying this method to resolve marital differences in their private lives, smug in the belief that this is what the woman wants and – moreover – the only thing that she understands. And this in circa 2001 after all the brouhaha of women's rights and emancipation!" (Courting Hindi Film *Ishtyle* P 61)

Pooja decides to leave the house Inder gifted her. She took two thousand rupees with her which were in the account before her marriage. She shifted to women's hostel where she had great difficulty in producing an appointment letter. She was also offered to work for her personal benefits but she bluntly declined saying that she is a respectable woman.

Kavita on other hand was also alone. She was a superstar who had all the riches of the world but the fear of losing Inder never let her live in peace. Her mind and heart were at constant struggle. Inder tried his best to calm her down but her outrageous behavior was a cause of worry. She was mentally disturbed and had hallucinations about Pooja visiting their house and crying out her pain. Kavita's guilt never let her enjoy her life. It was a constant reminder to her that by breaking someone's marriage she could not stay happy. She feared isolation and it was fatal to her.

Thus, the present study comes to the conclusion that Indian society is patriarchal and norms are designed in accordance to wishes of males. Females face a lot of problems and tragedies have become a part and parcel of their lives. Widow Remarriage, Dowry, Rapes, Female feticide and several such problems need to be addressed and the efforts should be made by the civil society and Indian government to improve the plight of women, reducing their predicaments. Although government has provided facilities like NSDM (National Skill Development Mission), Cottage Industry set up, free education up to secondary levels but still there is a lot more to be done in order to empower their lot. Instead of showering pretentious roles to women, conjoint effort of the society and government should intent to spread uniform quality education to generate indigenous employment avenues.

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