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Dismantling the Cultural Narratives: Identity Negotiation, Celluloid Females and the Hindi Cinema

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Abstract:

Among the numerous literary trends that have made their place in Contemporary English Literary Canon, conceptualisation related to identity issues has developed a great interest among scholars and readers. In fact, identity as a form of self expression and articulation is not purely a historical repository of past actions, accomplishments or liaisons, it also regulates actions. The present paper aims at analyzing the deconstruction of woman identity as victim in the institution of marriage and the reconstruction of autonomy and individuality through two contemporary movies *Queen* and *English Vinglish*. Sensitized more about their importance in the institution of marriage, the protagonists in these movies represent the new feminine cultural perspective. The paper charts the transformation of despair into discovery of wives in Hindi Cinema and the development of personal female identities as liberated and free from authoritative, omnipresent males; highlighting the limited presence of male protagonists.

Keywords: Identity, autonomy, self expression, transformation, liberation.

Introduction

Among the numerous literary trends that have made their place in Contemporary English Literary Canon, conceptualisation related to identity issues has developed a great interest among scholars and readers. In fact, identity as a form of self expression and articulation is not purely a historical repository of past actions, accomplishments or liaisons, it also regulates actions. The word 'Identity' derived from "French word 'identite', basically etymological roots lie in the Latin noun 'identitas', 'titas' itself is taken from the Latin word which means "the same". Thus, the word identity reflects the sense of oneness or sameness with others in a particular group of people. Chris Weedon in *Identity and Culture* argued for the need to redefine the norms of "existence". He adds that "a sense of national identity" was considered the most prominent,

“selective and simplified account of a complex history, much that is ignored, disavowed or simply forgotten” (30). Being prominently influential, it turns out to be disjunctive with the chief individual identity. Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp view that there “are fluid and temporary social constructions, made and remade over time” formulate “the remapping of cultural identities and practices for all those involved” (210). Consequently, the socially constructed identity overpowers personal individuality debarring individual from the self knowledge of the dynamic, coherent and internally consistent whole. Identity negotiation involves perceivers as well as targets, and the acceptance of the agreement between them regarding the assumed identity of the target. This process of identity negotiation process has been an imposition upon targets making them an object in the hands of the perceivers.

Despite its persistence in all the realms, the portrayal of women identity as stereotypical wives occupies a peripheral position in analytical and theoretical discussions. Nevertheless, in the contemporary decades, females, especially celluloid females have been avoiding such disjunctions, favoring instead individual personas that exemplify their enduring conception of who they are. In the echo of the same, Henri Bergson also avers “We cannot think of ourselves, we can only live, we cannot even conceive of ourselves as having a single clear identity; ... our being can only be found amidst the shifting currents of our most immediate experience” (quo. in Ellis 24). From the very outset of the 20th century, although, the traditional notion of femininity and institution of marriage prevails, one can still find a changing inclination of attitude amongst women. Kristian Smidth comments that the “more tragic is the realization that she is condemned to a life in hell from (where) there is no relief” (141). Sensitized more about their importance in the institution of marriage and equality in man woman relationship, females no longer accept those age old notions of femininity rather strive for their autonomy and rights. R. D. Laing views that “our relatedness to others is an essential aspect of our being, as is our separateness, but any particular person is not a necessary part of our being” (17).

From Negative to Generative Paradigm: Wives in Hindi Cinema

Taking a glance at cinema, one can suggest that earlier cinema did not represent women’s identity in relation to her own self but provided her limited roles in relation to her male counterpart. Haskell in her magnum opus, *From Reverence to Rape* asserts that film industry “manoeuvred to keep women in their place” and produced female “myths of subjection and sacrifice”, (2-3) from the “Victorian virgins” of the 1910s and 1920s to the deified sex goddesses and “sultry (and diabolical) *femmes fatales* of the traditional male fantasy” (374). Besides tracing this shift in women’s image through the decade of the twentieth century, she suggests that films as a social narrative should “take the woman out of the plural into the singular, out of defeat and passivity and collective identity into the radical adventure of the solitary soul, out of the contrivances of puritanical thinking into enlightened self-interest” (163). Identity for every human being as a whole is an intrinsically a psychologically fabricated social constrictive spatial connotations.

Peeping into the portrayal of female as wife in Hindi cinema, one can say that cinema projected her as a weeping character living and dying for her husband. The ideal housewives of *Sati Charitra*, *Sati Laxmi*, *Dharmo Lakshmi*, etc all portrayed devotional and dedicated housewives, consistent with traditional Indian roles, admiring the patriarchal social system and depending upon their husbands. Representing sexual purity and fidelity, this stereotypic caricature as socially inferior being could be seen in the narratives as well;

Bol re kathputli dor kaun sang bandhi

Sach batla tu naachi kiske liye

Banwari katputli dor piya sang bandhi

Main naachoon apne piya ke liye

- *Kathputli*

Women in *Parineeta* (1953), *Biraj Bahu* (1954), *Kathputli* (1957) trespassed their boundaries, society compelled them to realize their mistake and they were punished for transgressing. Be it Pushpa of *Kathputli* abandoned by her husband, Lalita of *Parineeta* made voiceless or Biraj in *Biraj Bahu* deceived by her closed ones. An year later, there could be seen no transformation. Celluloid wives were still the dutiful Sitas forced to choose tradition and duty over love and desire. Radha in *Sangam* (1964) turns into Sita when her husband suspects her of infidelity, Meena in *Gumrah* (1963) loses her individual identity becoming nothing more than just a wife and a mother as she says, “Yaha koi meena nhi rehti, yeh Mrs Ashok ka ghar hai”.

Sacrificing her own personal desires, women in *Tapasya* (1976) and *Aaina* (1977) were the ones betrayed by the family they sacrificed their lives for. Attesting to the fact that women can't live their life all alone, it is men in both these movies who become their saving grace. Indra's fiancée stays by her side through her struggle while Shalini's lover accepts her after being aware of her past. As a reflection of societal norm, Indian cinema has been portraying celluloid wives as 'forgive and forget' type of characters who when discovered the extramarital affair of her husband, used to win him from the other woman and forgive him. Eventually, characters like Pooja in *Arth* (1982) and Nisha in *Aakhir Kyon* (1985) stepped out of marriage as an obligatory institution and decided to live a life of their own choice. From a loved wife to a heartbroken, desperate, abandoned woman being ditched by her husband, Pooja's character emerges as a single independent individual. Even when the idyllic and stereotypical Nisha learns about her husband's indiscretions, she carves out a career as a writer, becomes popular and marries the other man. However, this transformation was not wholesome. Female characters in *Thodisi Bewafai* (1980), *Ek hi Bhoor* (1981) and *Naseeb Apna Apna* (1986) are the forgive and forget type of wives who even after discovering their husband's extramarital affair, pardon them, returning to their marital life in search of happiness once again. An year later, ideology still

remained the same and could be felt in movies like *Judaai* (1997), *Saajan Chale Sasuraal* and *Biwi No. 1* (1999). Either the wives compelled their husbands for remarriage or forgive husband's extramarital relation to relive their married life.

In the recent decades independent singletons have been a startling transition, reflecting a shift from being reliant towards being autonomous. Such representations are more prevalent in the movies like *Astitav* (2000), *Kya Kehna!* (2000), *Salaam Namaste* (2005), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), etc. Extramarital affairs as one of the themes became prevalent in movies like *Astitav* and *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*. The ground-breaking character of Tabu in *Astitav* expresses her desire for another man. She not only proclaims the physical needs of a woman but being different from ideal Sitas, she exiles, wrestling against the control being imposed upon her by Ram, her husband and the society. Questioning their authority to humiliate her, she challenges every argument made by them. It can be said that feminist solidarity and resistance lead to the emergence and articulation of new models of the self who have forged a new way to redress the injustice and oppression faced by them and also recovering and restoring women's voice and position which had earlier been erased and elided in patriarchal discourses. The laws of female morality presently are laid down and the hypocrisy of the male attitude is exposed.

From Passive to Active Agents: The New Avatars in *Queen* and *English Vinglish*

Focusing upon the movies of the contemporary decade, the paper charts the significance of individual identity for a woman, beyond the realm of marriage which has always been considered to be of paramount importance in her life. Being revered as the utmost authority, Manusmriti enshrined certain laws for humans based on the metrical works of *Dharmastra* textual tradition of Hinduism. It focused upon the role of female as a wife as the verse in chapter nine suggests, "the wife is the visible form of what holds together the begetting of children, the caring of them when they are born, and the ordinary business of every day" (Verse 27) and "Children, the fulfillment of duties, obedience, and the ultimate sexual pleasure depends upon a wife, and so does heaven, for oneself and one's ancestors" (Verse 28). Apparently, Manu does not provide any woman a separate identity apart from this role. Drawing upon these lines, film critic, Shoma Chatterji in "The Marrying and Unmarrying Kind: Marriage, Separation and Divorce" (1998) argues that as a wife "the woman has been victim of every imaginable kind of suppression, oppression, subordination and humiliation. Her role has almost always been clearly framed without shades of grey or scope of fluidity, interpretation, question" (62). Although the reel world has time and again focused on the strong social relevance of marriage in women's lives still the movies specifically those analyzed in this chapter, cater to a new feminine cultural perspective. Subverting the old customs, both the protagonists in the movies emerge in an absolute realistic and contemporary fashion.

The movie, *Queen*, starts with the pre-wedding ceremony of Rani, the main protagonist. A day before the marriage, her fiancé, Vijay rejects her claiming that she is no more a perfect

match for him. Rani being portrayed as a stereotypical female, it is something which she cannot bear and she collapses. In the echo of the same, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* also highlights how the notion of marriage is different for both the sexes. Husband is free to do whatever he desires where as wife will always be subordinate, submissive and parasitic in her dependence on him. As she avers, “Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them” (446). The conversation between Rani and Vijay at the advent of the movie reflects anxiety and fear that a girl in Indian society has when her fiancé refuses to marry her;

Mummy daddy kya kahenge... aap mere mummi
daddy ji se baat krlo jo krni hai, mujhse koi baat
mat kro, Vijay sb kuch aise khatam mat kro... jaise
aap kahenge mein vaise hi krungi... mujhse kaun
shaadi karega...

What will mom and dad say?... You speak to my
parents, don't talk to me, Vijay don't end
everything like that... I will do whatever you say...
Who will marry me? (My own translation)

Moreover, the subplot of the movie not only projects her love story but at the same time reflects the dependency of a female on male for her security, for her livelihood, happiness and secured future. Wherever she goes, she is always accompanied by her little brother. Her parents, especially mother never wants her to be alone when she goes out. Her prominent dialogue in the movie is “Chintu ko bhi le ja” (Take Chintu along with you).

Rani's first phase of transition begins during interaction with the father at dining table, “Mein apne honeymoon pe jaana chahti hu” (I wish to go for a honeymoon). For the first time she is out of her comfort zone as she was always under the protection of her parents. Although, she is anxious about her trip, her decision to go all by herself deserves appreciation, as it reflects her inner potential to face life even when life gave her pain and trouble. As an emergent woman, her journey from internalized oppression towards free mind constructs her identity as independent and self-defined. The transition from victimhood towards a free mind offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined, controlling images of women. She can be seen as reflecting the power dynamics involved in rejecting externally defined, controlling images of womanhood. This projection of Rani threatens the existing power arrangements. But her mother's concern is reflected again when she goes to the airport to drop Rani, as she says, “chintu ko saathle jaati toh acha hota”.

At Paris, Rani's identity is first revealed as suffocated with the memories of Vijay. But instead of hiding herself within the four walls of the room, she decides the roam around. She

befriends Vijaylakshmi, the hotel staff, who as a guiding spirit paves a new route for her. Both roam around the city, enjoy night riding, go to pubs, dance and drink. For the first time, she feels like a free bird. While dancing on the music of a bollywood song, “hungama hogya”, she recalls an anecdote wherein Vijay scolds her for dancing in a party. This makes her dance harder, projecting a sort of breaking off from the conventional constructs. Free from those painful memories, she enjoys freedom. Comparing the culture of both the countries, she says to Vijaylakshmi, “ladkiyo ko kuch bhi karna allowed nhi hai vahan pe...” (Girls are not allowed to do anything there). Many incidents in the movie project her as an emergent woman. A scene in the first half of the film shows a thief trying to grab her bag in Paris. Putting the strength of her entire body holding the bag, she does not let it go. In Amsterdam, her stay with three boys in one single room reflects her at unease but very soon she befriends them, roams around, enjoying and making fun.

Mistaken by the similar name, she sends her photo in modern outfit to vijay. Surprised by her new look, he begins with the journey in search of her. Finally when his search is over, he regrets his decision of leaving her. But his typical attitude makes him question her for sharing the room with three boys. This time Rani is no more in fear or bothered about Vijay and she refuses to talk to him. In her second meeting with him, she makes him realize that attending the rock show is much more important than listening him as his friends are there, “hum log kaha jaarhe hain, hum log toh delhi mein bhi baat krskte hain...” (where are we going? We can meet at Delhi as well). And when she returns to Delhi, she goes straight to his home and hands over the engagement ring without even a tinge of pain or feeling of being hurt. The scene itself shows her as independent, courageous and free individual, capable of decision-making, creating her own identity. Fighting her battle all alone, she is an autonomous woman experiencing life as she wants, living a life of continual discovery, freeing herself off the archaic layers of subjugation, passivity and guilt; she is a woman who is not afraid to be herself, who loves herself and keeps bringing optimistic vigor in her life; she is not a woman who is crying out in indignation against everything which holds her captive- be it family, society or the dictated roles, but makes her way between all these.

The protagonist is seen as discovering the joys of breaking free, cherishing life and living on her own terms. Various incidents and experiences in the movie, undoubtedly lead her to the realization of her inner reserves of strength and will power. Attesting to be an emergent woman, she is more aware of her individuality and her rights than her duties and responsibility towards others. In her quest for identity, Rani moves from despair to discovery, from self negation to self assertion from subjugation to autonomy. The narrative of a girl coming of age shows the effort to attain agency, and an authentic selfhood.

In the echo of the same, *English Vinglish* also reflects the same spirit of female transformation from negative to generative paradigm. It reads the evolving persona of new emerging Indian wife in an absolute realistic and contemporary fashion. Subverting the

traditional stereotypical custom of the meek Indian wife, the protagonist is a new Indian woman triumphing over custom, tradition and oppression. She is the one open to changes and willing to cater to the new demands of the generation.

The movie begins with Shashi's (the protagonist) conversation with her daughter wherein she says, "Yeh brown bread aur safed anda, yeh sab tere naye dance class ke baad shuru hua hai. Voh kya hai tumhara jhaans dance!" (This brown bread and egg, all has started with your new dance class, what you call that- Jazz Dance!). At that instant, her husband and daughter burst into laughter simply because of her mispronunciation. In the next scene, when she is preparing ladoos, she is seen quietly practicing the word "jazz" which demonstrates her keenness and determination to learn English in an appropriate manner. She does not only pursue her dreams of running a small catering business, but she is also aware that her lack of English skills is holding her back.

Further, when her husband denies giving her car for delivery of her sweets, she takes an auto and her servant to deliver the sweets. This throws light on her as a strong-willed and hard-working woman because she is capable of making her own decisions and she takes all the pain to run her business smoothly. The fact that her sweets are loved by everyone shows that she is a respectable woman known for her generosity and sincere dedication that she leaves no room for complaint from her customers. This also hints that Shashi is capable of adapting to any environment on her individual skills. Over all, she is depicted under positive spotlight.

Later at night, when her husband comes for dinner, he says:

Thank God maine un logo ke saath dinner nahi kiya nahi to...(his phone rings) apna hari mirch ka achar dena. After a momentary pause, he utters, "Shashi tum aur laddo vaddu ka chakkar band kardo yeh".

Thank God, I didn't had dinner with them, otherwise... Give me your red chilly pickle. Shashi, You leave all these tantrums of preparing sweets.

(my own translation)

Surprised with his statement, she replies, "Mera ek hi shauk hai voh bhi band kar dun?" To this he says, "Tere haath ka khaana sirf mere liye hai." The narrative reflects typical male's attitude towards a married female who is nothing but an object in his hands and he becomes her taker. As a domestic slave, she is supposed to take care of her family and concentrate on household work. In the echo of the same, Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) avers, "He thereby obtains a superior position that has no need of

any legal special privilege. In the family, he is bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat” (80).

Her response to this speaks volumes regarding her subordinate position,

Agar main khaana acha nahi banaati to tum ghar hi nahi aate na? ...Mere saath baat karna itna important nahi hai na? Oh! Bhul gayi. Important baatein to sirf English mein hoti hain na?

If I don't prepare good food then you won't come home? ... Is it not that important to chat with me?... Oh! I forgot. Important conversations are in English language only... (My own translation)

Despite her brilliant cooking and modesty, she is taken for granted by her husband and her teenage daughter who look at her with contempt. Her husband's statement shows his dominating attitude but Shashi is not willing to be submissive to every demand. It is the first hint we have that Satish disapproves of Shashi's outgoing and independent drive to be successful and earn her name. He is a businessman who deals constantly with phone calls, female workers, and speaking largely in English, which his wife is unable to understand.

The next day at the parent-teacher meeting, Shashi grows aware of her drawbacks. However, as observed by her body language, she is very friendly, cheerful and sociable. She deals well with Sapna's friend's mother (Neelam) and Sapna's class-teacher (Father Vincent). The only aspect she lacks is fluent English which can only come through practice (which everyone fails to understand in her family). Shashi requests Father Vincent to speak in Hindi as Hindi is our national language. This is a universal message because not everyone can speak English fluently and India needs to maintain its cultural diversity by keeping herself attached to her roots. Although father Vincent is unable to speak English proficiently, Shashi never makes fun of him and understands him. Shashi is not hypocritical and she is very honest when she says that “my English is not good”. She is not snobbish as she does not mind that Sapna wears short skirts or goes out with her male friends as long as her schoolwork is complete and she is performing well academically.

On returning back, her daughter argues with her;

aur aapne unhe kitna uncomfortable mehsoos karwaaya Hindi mein baat karke. Kya Sapna achi ladki hai? Kya sab usse pyar karte hain? God! Aur voh Café coffee day waala joke bolne ki kya zarurat thi aapko? Papa ko hi aana chahiye tha. Aur fir

Rubbal ki mummy ke saath bhi aap Hindi mein baat kar rahi thi. Saare jwaab mujhe dene padhte hain...

And you made him so uncomfortable by chatting in Hindi language. Is Sapna a good girl? Does everyone like her? God! And what was the need of cracking that joke about café coffee day? Papa would have come. Moreover, you were conversing in Hindi with Rubbal's mother as well. I have to respond everywhere... (My own translation)

At this stage, Shashi is hurt and is incapable of saying anything. She feels shattered. On arriving home, she says, "Main fail ho gayi...Aaj maine usse sharminda kiya. Ma Baap ko nahi, sirf ma ko". At night, when she speaks to her husband, she questions him, "btao na, kyun ki mujhse shaadi?...Kisi modern ladki se shaadi kyun nahi ki?" He giggles and replies, "Itna socha hota to shaadi hi kyun karta?" (Tell me, why you married me? ... why didn't you marry any modern girl?... He replies, "If I was that wise, I would have never married...")

She is moved to that extent that she begins to question her husband's choice and her place in the family because she is not able to control the matters. Her husband is perplexed by her sudden questioning. The tone of despair can be reflected by her statement to him as she responds, "Kitni bhi koshish kar lun, kisi ko khush nahi kar paati." Soon, her husband receives a call from shashi's sister from New York, informing them about her elder daughter's marriage. Shashi is to go first to NY, but she seems very insecure, unconfident and unhappy at the prospect of leaving her family behind for three weeks. At the same time, she is shown helpless as to how will she manage going to such a distant place and that too all by herself. This unselfish model of a woman in relation to her family can be correlated to what Virginia Woolf highlights by the epithet of "Angel in the house" in her "Professions for Women" wherein she encapsulates the traits of a woman as,

...intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily...she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (150)

Here, Woolf hinges upon the need of woman to be decisive, to be a new self, less suppressed by others. Using the metaphor of killing the conception "Angel of the House", she poignantly expresses an attitude of total determination. To be a successful woman, the theoretical

and political dialogues of feminism are still significant. Free choice and individuality should be made neglecting the pressures of the angel in the house.

Besides this, the patriarchal conventions and restrictions which are inflicted upon couples under the patriarchal paradigms can be seen when she questions her husband who hugs his colleague, “Humara to kareebi rishta hai, isiliye hum hug nahi karte hai na?” Her statement not only questioning her position and her value in the family and relationship but she also speaks for the Indian values.

The first feminist theme kick in when Shashi takes the money that she has saved from her business and converts them into dollars. This implies that her ambitions are stemming directly from her own financial gain as a confectioner. She eventually joins a month long class to learn English. She does so to achieve her personal goals.

On the flight to New York, Shashi is very receptive to the changes around her. She is obedient and friendly. She tastes wine for the first time, although she disapproves of the bitter taste, she is neither cynical nor critical. She is a quick learner and adapts to all the changes very smoothly. At the crucial juncture of the movie, Amitabh Bachchan makes a cameo as a character who lets Shashi know that she should not feel guilty for needing help. She receives moral boost from Amitabh Bachchan when he says:

Suniye. In Angrezi logo se darne mat... Yeh tumhara U.S. mein pehla visit hai. Pehli baar ek hi baar aata hai. Aur pehla anubhav bohot special hota hai so enjoy! Beshakk, befikra, bindaas! All the best!”

Listen! Don't be scared of these English people. This is our first visit to U.S. First time is the last time. And the first experience is very special, so enjoy! Without any doubts or tensions, feel free! All the best! (My own translation)

From this moment onwards, one can see Shashi mesmerized and smiling. It also reflects a welcome note for her into the world of English! When Shashi is finally at her sister's place, they indulge in a deep and emotional conversation. “Dus saal ho gaye hain Anil ko guzre huye. Aaj mujhe uski kami bohot mehsoos hoti hai Shashi. Selfish kahi ka! Sab kuch mujh par akela chod kar chala gaya.” To this Shashi consoles her “Manu, tumko dekhti hun na, mujhe bohot garv hota hai. Kahan se kahan pohunch gayi tum! (giggles) Saraswati Vidyalaya yaad hai tumhe? Ek bhi shabd angrezi ka nahi jaante the hum! Kuch bhi nahi. Ab dekho. America mein itna bada kaam karti ho. Aur do ladkiyon ko akele hi padhaya. Great Manu.”

Manu replies, “Anil yaar Anil. Agar usne mujhe badhaava nahi na diya hota Shashi, to main vaisi ki vaisi hi reh jaati. I miss him so terribly yaar”. Here Shashi is motivated by her elder sister Manu who is the head of the house, although she accounts her husband Anil for her victory over her struggle. The director portrays a distinction and reversal of gender roles where Manu is leading the house. Shashi is greatly inspired by her sister and she is filled with positive energy. She also senses that even a woman is capable of managing and controlling a household with daughters. In other words, the iron gates of patriarchy are heavily challenged. Shashi also feels thankful to God because her family is complete and she has all the love which she needs. At the dinner table, Shashi begins to miss the company of her family and she calls her husband to check on her family as she begins to feel home-sick. But her husband is too busy, and she is told to enjoy her life in New York.

When she goes for a snack at a coffee house, she is unable to respond to the counter lady. As a consequence, she becomes nervous and creates a mess out of herself. Embarrassed, she runs away from the restaurant, takes a seat and begins to weep. Those tears represent her agony, her internal struggle to cope with a new world of English and her frustration because she has finally stepped out of her comfort zone. She shows us that the outside world is a very tough and challenging one so women need to be capable and confident of tackling all issues on front. She is finally beginning to realize that her inability to speak English is a blow to her self-esteem and she finally gets an awakening call, that is, she must do something about this. At that instant, she reads an advertisement on a bus which states “Learn English in 4 Weeks”. Shashi is tempted and aroused because she finally has an opportunity to achieve what she needs. She memorizes the number.

She calls the New York Language Centre and finally reaches there using the train and asking people. She sighs with confidence when she finally reaches there. While depicting the international students, the movie does dig into stereotypes: a Pakistani cab driver, a South Indian engineer, a Mexican nanny, an Asian hairdresser, a flamboyant gay and a French Chef (Laurent Nabbou), also a cook. However, it can be stated on the safe side that the characters were well-intended and served to show the different goals and aspirations they wanted to achieve when they emigrate to the States. Shashi a great feminist character who really comes into being her own and shows that being feminine is not the same as being weak. She has strong relationships with other females and is an entrepreneur (one of the first words she learns and repeats with immense pride). She makes many friends at her English class and still keeps relationships intact with her family. She does not have to “choose” between her career, family, and dreams.

Laurent tastes her laddoos and tells her, “You are an artist.” Shashi retorts, “When a man cooks, it’s an art. When a woman cooks, it’s just her duty.” This line perfectly encompasses the greatest obstacle in Shashi’s life. She has been taught since childhood that cooking is something she is good at. However, when a man cooks, he is applauded because he is taking on a task considered feminine and this somehow improves the task. Shashi’s frustration with her

husband's inability to consider her feelings outside her familial roles is emphasized. Laurent responds: "No. No, no. Food is love. You cooking with love, good food. You make people happy. You artist. Not small. " Shashi is flattered because no one has even credited her for all the love she puts in her cooking. Laurent further advises her to open a French restaurant so that she can feel the magic she has made on the others.

Radha comes to know about Shashi's secret English classes. As a second generation immigrant born and raised in the US, Radha is the character with whom most of the present generation can connect to. She is the bridge between the largely differing cultures of American and India, seamlessly travelling between the two and being completely at home in both. Radha supports Shashi whole-heartedly and understands her drive to learn and excel in English. She also continues to embrace Indian traditions and cherish them, not ashamed or hesitant. Their relationship is very well defined.

As soon as she comes out of the theatre, there is another conflict when Sapna calls Shashi (in NY) from India to complain about her missing journal and makes an offhand remark about her mother's illiteracy in English.

Kya hakk banta hai bachon ka apne ma baap se is tarah baat karne ka? Izzat ka matlab to jaante hi nahi. Kya kachchre ki petti hun main jo mann mein aaya fenk diya? Kya rishta hai yeh? Kitni koshish karte hain hum khud ko khush rakhne ki. Aur woh, kitni asaani se humara dil dukhate hain. Bache masoom hote hain. Yeh kaisi massumiyat hai, jo har pal humari kamzori ka faayda hi uthaati hai? Sab kuch sikhaaya ja sakta hai. Par kisi ke bhavnaon ka khyal rakhna, kaise sikhaaya jaye?

What right do these children have to speak to their parents like this? They don't understand the meaning of respect. Am I something useless which when they desire will throw away? What sort of relation is this? We try so hard to make ourselves happy. And they hurt our feelings so easily. Children are innocent. What sort of innocence is this which exploits our weakness? Everything can be taught. But how can we teach somebody feelings and emotions? (My own translation)

At this stage, Shashi is fully conscious of her self-esteem and she feels that she has been taken for granted by her family. Before, she would only listen to end the strife but now things

have gone out of control and she realized her importance and her dignity is hurt. It's no surprise that by the end of the film, Shashi will conquer her fears, but the route Shinde takes to get her there is distinctively Shashi's. The image of the newly confident Shashi striding down a Manhattan street, a takeout coffee in hand and a trench coat belted over her sari, marks the real change and adds to the notion of emergent women.

Lauren's relationship with Shashi is very meaningful and emotional. An interesting moment arises when he compliments on Shashi's beauty: "She's very beautiful. Her eyes are like two drops of coffee in a cloud of milk. I come to class so I can see her." She leaves class instantly. Although we assume that she is embarrassed or ashamed of being complimented (even the other characters criticize Laurent for revealing his feelings publicly to an Indian woman.) We come to know the reason she left class was because nobody had complimented her in such a long time that she didn't even know how to react. Laurent ultimately helps her regain her confidence and self esteem, and to see herself from a different perspective- one that respects and appreciates her. It's also interesting to note that with Laurent, the playing field is much more equal since they both cook and neither can speak proper English. With her husband, Shashi is clearly subordinate since her duties as a housewife are not considered significant and he is the social, economic, and intellectual superior.

Once Laurent's affections become clear for her at the roof, Shashi is deeply flattered but then refuses to further indulge the relationship, showing her commitment towards her family and refusal to be corrupted, though she almost certainly shares his feelings. This becomes evident when she is giving him a laddoo in the last scene: "Jab apne aap ko pasand nahi karte hai na, to apne se juri huyi har cheez achi nahi lagti. Naye cheeze akarshit karti hain. Jab apne aapko pyar karne lagte hain, to wahi puraani zindagi nayi lagne lagti hai. Achi lagne lagti hai. Thank you, mujhe apne aap se pyar karna sikhaane ke liye. Thank you for making me feel good about myself. Thank you so much." She leaves Laurent touched and in tears.

Contrary to what Laurent makes her feel, her husband limits her role, her existence on the ability to prepare food. In one of the dialogue, he actually expresses his perception regarding her, "And my wife, she was born to make laddoos!" In this single statement, he has erased her feelings, hard work, ambitions, and intelligence in any field other than making sweets. It is dangerously close to the people who base a woman's entire life around the concept of her motherhood, making women little more than a uterus. Then, Satish tries to soothe her by saying "It's a compliment!" and not acknowledging his mistake at all- instead, trying to make her the victim for being offended by the comment.

Shashi's final speech on the occasion of her niece's wedding is very striking and ironic. "This marriage is a beautiful thing. It is the most special friendship. Friendship of two people who are equal. Life is a long journey. Meera sometimes you will feel you are less. Kevin sometimes you will also feel you are less than Meera. Try to help each other to feel equal, it will

be nice. Sometimes married couples don't even know how the other is feeling so how they will help the other? It means marriage is finished? No, that is the time you have to help yourself. Nobody can help you better than you. If you do that, you will return back feeling equal, your friendship will return back. Your life will be beautiful. Meera, Kevin, maybe you all very busy, but have family. Son, daughter. In this big world, yours small little world. It will make you feel so good. Family can never be judgmental. Family will never put you down, will never make you feel small. Family is the only one who will never laugh at your weaknesses. Family is the only place where you will get love and respect. That's all Meera and Kevin. I wish you all the best. Thank you!" Here she does not only give wise suggestions to the couple but she also recollects from her experience and imparts a strong message for all married couples to maintain the equilibrium through emotional support.

As a lovely feminine character she not only reflects the caring aspect of woman but also projects that a woman's desires to succeed as an individual does not negate or cancel her desire for love, marriage and domesticity. Shashi proves that she holds unparalleled skills and dynamism apart from natural compassion, humanity, love and generosity. In reference to Bhabha's concept of "third space" it can be said that Shashi places herself comfortably between two extremes of traditional Indian woman and a western radical woman. She presents an honest snapshot of truth of a woman's world, woven into an appealing visual tapestry.

Conclusion

The female protagonists in both the movies are multi-textured yet organic creations offering gorgeous projections and powerful political message illuminating how India's complex culture locked women into limiting roles. They do not project the profile of a woman who meets one's expectations contained in vocabulary such as 'identity', 'alienation', or 'fulfillment', instead set new parameters for one's appreciation of female self. The movies began with the projection of protagonists as passive and helpless but as the plot unfolds, an element of surprise can be observed. The inherent, age old image of women is being distorted, allowing the spectators to break away from their assumed past representations.

Lack of patriarchal intervention assists in proving that women can move beyond constrictions of the ideology, the cult of a true womanhood. The ideology allows the perpetrators to be the beneficiaries while calling for women's complicity in the denigration of self. Such women make the emergence from the private sphere of reality, despite the seeming impediment of feminine biology. As a result, the romanticizing of woman's role in the family and home segregate women, barring them from the public domain becomes a thing of the past.

Further, there is an absence of sensuality and the correlation between purity of a woman and her destiny in both the movies. Deconstructing the hierarchy that exists between good and bad, the movies depict that morality has no relation with happiness and even if the characters are virtuous, something bad happens to them. This in a way liberates them from being guilty

especially when they are prey and they evolve as predators. Even the song narratives and lyrics are about self-discovery which assists in analyzing their character in more depth. Absence of item songs or sexual scenes leads to the absence of heroism which male protagonists display either by rescuing the female from criminals or by making her an object of male gaze.

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