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The Role of the Mother in her Child's Life: First Teacher-Lifelong Guide-Loving Advisor!!!! A Study through Select Hindi Films

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Abstract:

Dissemination of knowledge and wisdom, awareness and empowerment through an entirely different medium: Cinema, both mainstream and parallel is being practiced for a long time by eminent Indian filmmakers. The paper proposes to present the cinematic representation of the 'mother' in Hindi Cinema down the ages, Cinema being an important agent for social change and radical thinking as a part of Cultural Studies today. The chief objective of the paper is to show the value of the mother as the first educator of her child and how the morals and values inculcated by her become so effective in shaping the child's entire life, ensuring holistic and positive development.

Keywords: tender years, first educator, values, inspirations, supportive.

“For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.”

The foundation and most of the framework of the human action system is laid down in the first decade of life. The 'tender years' in a child's life are dominated by the influence of the family members, usually the parents. Within the home, the *mother* plays the central role in the molding process of the child because *she* has more and closer contacts with the child than any other family member. (Hurlock; 1983:88) And if this early molding favors the development of a healthy personality pattern, the individual is far less vulnerable to unfavorable conditions which may penetrate the child's life later. The mother remains the chief influence, the primary educator and the first teacher of any child; she is the base of a child's journey of life.

It is the mother who is responsible for sowing the first seeds of moral education and imbibing the value of good conduct and the principles of correct living in her child's life. The absence of a mother in a child's life is a deep irreparable loss; one that cannot be compensated in any manner. The mother's education is not one that is associated with academic excellence or literacy input but one that helps shaping the child into a 'human being', possessing kindness and compassion, sensitivity and selflessness and righteousness and courage as well. “A consistent research finding is that children of most ages chose the mother as the preferred

parent. Mother is generally considered to be more accepting, less punitive, less strict, less threatening, and more nurturing.”(Jersild et al; 1978: 224)Her influence on the kids is definitely more impacting. She becomes a role model for her kids and they learn the rudimentary lessons of life from her. The society needs such mothers to raise such ‘healthy’ individuals who will together comprise a beautiful society and a better world.

The paper showcases mothers immortalized on the silver screen down the ages; the ones selected have their unique pearls of wisdom which are aimed towards their children but which can be imbibed by the society at large. As a part of Cultural Studies today, Cinema is an important agent for social change and radical thinking. Thus the relevance of the paper rests in expressing the value of the *these* screen mothers who may be considered role models and true teachers of basic as well as moral education : beacons in today's materialistic, rapidly degenerating valueless society.

My Name Is Khan (2010,Karan Johar) is the story of Rizwan Khan played by Shahrukh Khan, suffering from Asperger's syndrome who is always supported and guided by his mother, Razia Khan. *She teaches him the most important lesson in life: being a good human being and respecting other human beings and humanity as well is more important than any other thing in life.* In times turbulent with fanatical religious fervor, she teaches her son that that there are only two kinds of people; the GOOD and the BAD. Those who follow the right path are good and those who do not are bad. This is the only difference among human beings: other differences related to cast, creed, religion, nationality and status do not make any difference. She tells her son that *you* are either a good person or a bad person: religion is not the criterion, humanity is. Her son grows up with this fact so deeply ingrained in his mind that though he is branded a terrorist, due to his nationality, he is the one who risks his own life to save the lives of hundreds of people of another community, in the United States of America, trapped due to flood waters. Khan is always rightly guided by what his beloved *ammi* had told him. Case studies of mother-child relationships have correctly observed and noted that “...mothering is a matter of social stimulation as well as physical care.”(Ambron; 1981:146)

Maine Pyaar Kiya (1989,Sooraj Barjatya) showed the protagonist Prem, although born with a silver spoon in his mouth, ready to sacrifice everything for his principles and the correct choices that he makes in life. It is his mother that helps him during this difficult time. *It is she who teaches him the value of relationships, correct judgments and true emotions.* “...study suggests that the quality of mother-child attachment in infancy may in turn affect the later quality of play and problem solving behavior of the child.”(ibid: 146) Prem and his mother indeed have a special bonding, an attachment for each other. It is she who nurtures his true love leading to a marriage that is not entwined with materialistic business deals. She allows him to follow his heart and do what is right. She supports his love and it is her values that make her son immune to the lust of prestige and wealth, ready to give up all the money and power offered by his father without any remorse or second thoughts. All this cannot be learnt by her son in a single day. “...when the young children's surroundings do not provide sufficient stimulation, their maturation may be retarded, sometimes even impairing their intelligence and mental health. A favorable environment, rich in intellectual as well as

emotional stimulation is therefore an important factor, in full development of each child's potential." (ibid: 175) Only a mother can provide such an atmosphere and Prem's mother does provide him with all this and much more because Prem could very well have become a spoilt brat; cold, unfeeling and businesslike, a replica of his 'successful' father. This brings us to another important deliberation given by [Psychologists] Burton White (1975) and Selma Frailberg (1977) and others stressing the importance of mother to the infant. The first two years of life are so important, they say, in terms of attachment and cognitive and emotional development that the mother should make every effort to stay at home with her child. (ibid: 433) Instead of joining her husband's business empire, Prem's mother preferred to be a full time mother and offer quality time to her son: an investment that definitely did not go in vain. Prem is ready to take up any job, however menial it might be. While the father comes and taunts condescendingly ; trying to tempt him with his luxury, *it is the mother who applauds his hard work, the dignity of labour and her son's ability to carve a niche for himself away from his father's shadow, albeit forsaken with difficulties*. She is not ashamed to have a daughter-in-law who is lower than them in social hierarchy because she is a better judge of people unlike her husband. She does not desert her husband altogether but continues to support her son too. The mother plays a very significant role in the film. One of the few to fall against the line of husband worship; she went against the tide and encouraged and supported her son to stand for what is right and blessed her son's efforts to get back his beloved at the cost of displeasing her husband: almost a sacrilege in that decade. (Somaaya et al;2012:109) If the love smitten young boys learnt valuable lessons of love and commitment from Prem, the mother had a strong influence and lessons to impart too. Almost on the same line is the presence of the strong surrogate mother in the film **Abhimaan** (1973, Hrishikesh Mukherjee) who shows a rare kind of sensitivity towards her daughter-in-law and actually supports her, reprimanding the son for his misdeeds and punishing *him* by breaking all contacts. Considering the then existing differences between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law and the apparent tilt towards the son, turning a blind eye to all his deeds, this kind of decision taken by the mother in the film reinforced the idea that if the mother can be a fountain of pure love she can also be a rock of Gibraltar when it comes to correct unbiased judgment. Almost seventeen years later, the blockbuster **Biwi No.1** (1999, David Dhawan) may have been the story of the wife's attempts to free her stray husband from the clutches of the 'other' woman but what is commendable is the way the mother-in-law supports her daughter-in-law and not her *eklautla laadla beta*, in complete contrast to the almost devotional relationship between the mother and the son, particularly in the patriarchal Indian society.

Mother India (1957, Mehboob Khan), **Deewar** (1975, Yash Chopra) **Trishul** (1978, Yash Chopra) and **Agneepath** (1990, Mukul S. Anand) have screen mothers who raise their children single handedly but instill in them extremely rigid principles and ideologies that stay with them till the end, even in the most adverse conditions. Honour is the most important ingredient in the life of such mothers and that of their children. No sacrifice is great enough for them to retain the basic principle of honesty and righteousness ruling their life and this is something that their children, the sons particularly, not only learn but also admire and respect in their mother, however painful or loathsome life's journey may be. These mothers

completely believe in the fact that what is right is always right and what is wrong is always wrong. Radha played by Nargis in **Mother India** dotes on her son, Birju. She and her sons have faced every kind of adversity in their life but still that does not give them the liberty to either resort to violence or ill-means or to take revenge. It is rightly said that teaching children appropriate expression of anger and control of aggression is one of the most difficult feats of socialization. (Ambron; 1981:228)Radha sticks to her basic principles and her ideologies to the extent that she kills her own son when he digresses from the societal paths. *She breaks the stereotype that the mother cannot be 'strong' or cannot judge her own kids in an unbiased manner. Radha, as a mother teaches what standing for truth and righteousness actually mean.*

The mothers in **Deewar** and **Agneepath** are no less in imparting the lessons of truth and righteousness and the fatal repercussions of taking the wrong path even when it becomes inevitable. *These mothers, essentially fighters, nevertheless reinstate the idea of being 'good' and oppose taking law in one's own hands. Violence in any form, even to avenge is always wrong. When the sons do not agree to this notion, the mothers break off all relations from their own offsprings: something painful and pitiable but unavoidable since the ideologies do not match. The love and the care for the child remains but the mothers are not ready to compromise with their principles however outdated or useless they might seem to the child.* As noted novelist George Eliot writes in Adam Bede [1859], "The mother's yearning, that completest type of the life in another life which is the essence of real human love, feels the presence of the cherished child even in the debased, degraded man."(Ratcliffe; 2007:185) The pain that the mother then feels at the moral decline of her child is no match to the success or the revenge that the child takes. In such cases, the children suffer from hardened feelings, which begin to develop as a necessity for survival towards their so called triumph of life. This triumph and the insatiable wrong kind of pride that follows it could have turned the men into monsters had it not been for their mother's deep influence on their lives which clings to them as a second skin.(Horney;1991:203) And whether it is Vijay's death in his mother's lap in *Agneepath*, or the other Vijay's plea to God to save his mother's life in *Deewar*, reaffirming the loss of faith in her son, the fact remains that they were never unable to totally wipe out the values and ideologies inculcated in them by their mothers which led to their surrender and their admittance to the superiority of humanity and forgiveness. It also led to the protagonists realizing that it is better live in penury than to touch wrongly earned money. A life of difficult but honest poverty which the mother chose despite her son's burgeoning wealth was always superior compared to a life of ill-gotten luxury .The iconic dialogue from *Deewar*, "*mere paas maa hai !!!!*" is relevant even today, in all circumstances.

Trishul(1978,Yash Chopra)is the story of Savitri and her son and their unified fight for justice. Savitri, the unwed mother had been deserted by her lover for a rich man's daughter for a profitable business arrangement. Savitri brings up her son the hard way and extracts the promise of revenge at her death bed. In true Machiavellian manner the angry son fights the whole system and carves a strong Social Identity. He is able to win his battle and defeat his unjust father. However, he mellows with time, having genuine affection for his step family and is also accepted by them. The idea of revenge slowly changes to that of forgiveness,

perhaps allowing concessions for his father's unavoidable choices in life, which may have been due to his forced conformity to societal norms ; emotionally blackmailed and leading an empty inner life. This metamorphosis in Vijay is not completely his own doing. *His mother's education that included honesty, morals and values is also instrumental in him emerging as the 'correct' human being.* It must be remembered that the purpose of education is not to fill the minds of with facts...it is to teach them to think, if that is possible, and always to think for themselves.”(Roy; 2005: 67)And Vijay's education does contain this very important ingredient, something that his school may have missed but his mother did not. Even when he is maneuvering, he is never unjust. His sense of righteousness and correct judgment are legacies from his mother that stand by his side always. The mother as the perfect teacher educated him, “...enabling the child to adjust himself to his social environment and maintain social relationships.”(Thamarasseri; 2008:27)

Dabang (2010,Abhinav Kashyap) and **Om Jai Jagdish** (2002,Anupam Kher) show *mothers trying their level best to hold on to family ties, love, bonding and selflessness ;very relevant in the materialistic selfish world today.* The mother does remain the thread that binds all the members of the family, trying to educate them in her own manner in matters related to life, relationships, humanity and values. Family education remains the original role of education. Its characteristics are to inculcate desirable sentiments and attitude and to help form sound habits of living through mutual contact between parents and a child. (Sarangi ; 1996 :154) The mother in **Dabang** tries continuously to mend relationships between her son and his stepfather. She also tries to justify the father's preference towards his biological son by pointing out the deficiencies and weaknesses in the step-brother. She spends her whole life trying to unite her family, especially the marginalized son who has become a man of worth but has not forgotten the discriminatory treatment meted out to him. The mother remains the embalming spirit: teaching them all the value of a family, trying desperately not to hurt anyone. She is there for everyone offering unconditional love and support, accepting them as they are. It is only after her death that the three males realize her role in their lives and what she had been trying to teach them: family is valuable and family has to be together.

The mother in **Om Jai Jagdish** dedicates her life to her three sons. Her whole being is centered around them and her only desire in life is to keep her family, her sons together, in a special bond. This desire and the consequent efforts are both commendable in the present world marked with nuclear families and individual aspirations that has no place for either sacrifices or selflessness. But as psychoanalyst Karen Horney observes, “[the child] needs warmth, feeling welcome, care, protection, an atmosphere of confidence, encouragement in his activities and constructive discipline. These factors given, he will develop “basic confidence”; that is, confidence in others as well as in self. (Horney; 1991:86-87)The mother, Sarasawati Devi provides all this and much more to her three sons and that is why despite facing myriad adversities and stormy upheavals, the disjointed family does get reunited, happier and stronger and the mother proudly announces *that her home is not made of walls, but is the place: any place where her three sons stand together.*

There is, of course, a great deal of interest in the question of how children learn; and despite individual differences certain general principles can be seen. It is apparent even to the casual observer, for example that children learn by doing what they have observed someone else do. (Ambron ; 1981 :177) This is seen in **Satyakam** (1969, Hrishikesh Mukherjee), the story of Satya Priya Sahay, a principled man who never breaks his principles and never mouths untruths, something he has inherited from his staunch god fearing Gandhian father. Interestingly, after his death, his father resorts to lies to save his family's 'honor'. It is the grandchild who spills the beans; revealing that he cannot light the funeral pyre not because he is underage but because he is not the biological son of his father and that this 'truth' has been told to him by his mother and his mother never lies. The mother may be a tainted woman in the eyes of the society. Nevertheless *she is the one who teaches the value of truthfulness to her son; a legacy of her husband: something which the pious 'ever-truthful' old man had tried to hide fearing society.*

"Mothering" is something that a child always needs. This mothering is generally described as behavior that is affectionate, nurturant, warm and supportive. A child must feel cherished, valued and also comforted. (ibid: 233-34) Sometimes it may happen that this mothering is so intense that the mother may not be aware of her own over protectiveness. However, the mother in **Khoobsurat** (1980, Hrishikesh Mukherjee) is totally different from the concept of this 'mothering'. Dina Pathak, as the strong matriarch, rules over her large family. Her word is the law. *Her heart is full of love and care for everyone but it never oversteps the rules that she has set for them.* Her strictness is not always welcome but never disobeyed. The arrival of a family guest does lead to the expression of resentment and the rebellion that takes place in her absence, culminating in breaking all rules that she had imposed. *She teaches the value and importance of discipline, needed to bind a family, particularly a joint family with members having varied interests and dispositions.* She tells them how a strict diet has ensured longevity to their father, fixed dinner time ensured that the family ate one meal together remaining united, regular family outings and picnics ensured that the younger ones were not led astray by wrong company and husbands and wives developed stronger bonds. It was only after she freed them from the constraints of her disciplined regime that the family members realized how correct her rules were and this was the kind of 'mothering' that was required of the mother.

Iqbal (2005, Nagesh Kukunoor) is the story of a physically impaired boy whose natural acumen for sports, primarily cricket, is blatantly overlooked by his father under the guise of financial constraints and the child's disabilities. It is here that the 'mother' once again rises to the occasion. If not anything else, she *at least believes in her child and trusts his abilities, providing him her full support*, something that every child needs at every stage of her/his life, notwithstanding that a child remains a child to his parents and needs their love and support at every stage of his life no matter how grown up she/he might be. The father enters the picture much later, apologetic and guilty, only after the initial battle had been won. "Children need to be listened to as much for what they don't say as for what they do say. They may be unable or unwilling to voice their concerns...*the adults should listen for that concern and then voice it.* (ibid :233.emphasis added) With her patience and a waiting-willing ear, only a mother can

do this and turn a confidant to her children, understanding their unspoken needs much better than anyone else.

Rang De Basanti (2006,Rakyesh Omprakash Mehra)had two very strong mothers placed at social polarities but the ideologies and the backgrounds converged in their understanding of their child, their sons' intrinsic desire, never imposing anything on them and letting them be happy as and how they are ; something that parents, even mothers, may boast of but never actually allow to happen to the child either due to societal norms or a desirable career growth[*read materialistic causes*].When there is no fear of being left alone, out of reach of the persons who are the child's anchor of safety and familiarity, the child feels the complete sense of security. (ibid : 214) This security resides in the quality of attachment between the mother and the child. (ibid : 216) And due to this security, the child is able to develop into enthusiastic, persistent and hard working adult, cocooned in the fact that she/he can always seek their mother's help and pay attention to directions provided by her. DJ, played by Aamir Khan's mother, Mitro, allows her son to lead his life seeped in existentialist terms. "They [existentialists] are responsible for creating their lives according to their own values-and not by following the 'herd'-by reflecting clearly on their situation and relationships and by acting authentically.(Tidd;2007:15)It is important however to note that *the son does not betray this trust. He may appear a bohemian and a loser in life, repeating classes in the universities and whiling away his time, but is however, endowed with his own sense of patriotism, loyalty and 'correct' nationalism* that mushrooms from his own set of principles and sense of justice. The *principles of righteousness ingrained in him never let him digress* and his mischief never turns to harm. His fight for justice is appreciated and his sacrifice equals that of a martyr, something that the mother understands and thus makes no emotional demands or express grievances. Her stoic calm is the strength for her son's courage and determination.

Waheeda Rehman, playing Mrs. Rathod is the elite, urban mother; calm, cool and sophisticated, but endowed with the same stoic principles. Despite having lost her husband in the war, she never hesitates in letting her son become a fighter pilot, ready to serve the country, teaching him lessons of patriotism and loyalty. However the injustice to her son by her own countrymen makes her take a strong stand. Her courage is expressed by her selflessness and her grit. She faces the fatal blow without any fear. Even her relationship with her probable daughter-in-law is never conservative or traditional. Her son's friends are no achievers but they are as welcome as her place as they are at Mitro, DJ's mother's place. The two sons, raised by their mothers grow up as strong individuals and reinstate that "fathering" is actually more a gendered term than a biological one. (Ambron; 1981:146) The patriotism that these two mothers show is also seen in **Border** (1990, J.P.Dutta) where the mother has not only lost her husband in the first world war but is also blind and dependent. Still the fire of patriotism and the desire to serve the motherland is so strongly imbibed in both mother and son that she willingly sends her son to the front and is more of an inspiration than a burden to him.

The mother in **Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa** (1998, Govind Nihalani) is a rare kind of mother. Of her four children, three are well settled and successful in the social parameters. It is the youngest son who is a 'loser' in the society, partially because he believes in the socialist

theories and also because he is the only one who understands his mother's suppression and exploitation in the patriarchal structure of his house. The mother, tradition bound and quiet by nature has resigned herself to her fate but what she does not realize is how valuable her silent support and affinity is to her youngest child, supposedly weak and unsuccessful, with regards to his own dreams. According to Alan Sroufe, the William Harris Professor of Child Psychology in the Institute of Child Development and adjunct Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota, the securely attached child is the one who develops trust and is able to explore more; the mother being the basic source of this trust. "The security of knowing the mother is there enables the child to develop a sense of autonomy." (ibid: 214) *It is this security that enables Vрати, the son to chase his dreams, to fight for his ideologies against a corrupt system and lose his life at the age of just twenty years. He may have been a weak and unsuccessful person to others, in fact a black mark on his elite family but he was a real hero to his mother, a hero for her because he was the only one who followed the call of his own heart and who actually imbibed the correct principles and values that the mother possessed.*

Nil Battey Sannata (2016, Ashwini Iyer Tiwari) shows that the mother child attachment is not based primarily on feeding only. (ibid: 145) And Chanda, the protagonist, the single mother proves this true as she becomes the perfect inspiration and guide for her daughter. The mother and daughter share an unconventional relationship that is marred by jealousy, inadequacy and also the daughter's escapism and laziness compared to the mother's dedication, hard work and sunny disposition. The film is all about a mother's optimism and faith in her daughter, irrespective of the social strata or constraints: reflecting also the changes being observed in the social expectations of the gender roles. The film shows that Chanda does not have a dream, her daughter is her dream. *The ability and the strength to fight all adversities, with no complaints but just the desire for up gradation teaches the most valuable lesson to her daughter, Appu. Shaken by her daughter's audacious comment that her indifference to studies is fuelled by the sheer truth that her mother does not have the means for her higher studies and she is doomed to be a bai as well; Chanda takes up the challenge to complete her own education and score marks higher than her daughter in mathematics, her daughter's nemesis. Chanda's stubbornness and her dedication defeat her daughter's resignation. The daughter soon imbibes her mother's zeal for achievement and her courage for any kind of hard work required for her progress.* The same daughter who mocked her mother about her inadequacies becomes a proud achiever. Thus Chanda becomes one of those mothers whose influence is actually the *social force* which according to eminent Danish psychotherapist Erik Erikson influence the child's development. (ibid: 10-11)

Conclusion:

A mother's work must be recognized as a process that calls for continuous and sustainable intuition, creativity, improvisation and expressiveness during her interactions with her children. This interaction results in the overall holistic development of a child enabling her/him to emerge as good human beings. The happiness lost at home can hardly ever be regained in the outer world. The mother needs to be the companion, the advisor, the confidant of her kids. It is the mother that provides this happiness and the early education; education that is moral, rather than academic. This moral development of a child implies

inculcation of a number of qualities as honesty, truthfulness, self-respect, self-control, compassion, duty consciousness and righteousness in the children. This development becomes the base of his total life and nothing and no one could replace the role and the value of the mother during these initial years.

According to Sigmund Freud, the founder of the psychodynamic theory, a person's unique character type develops in childhood largely from parent-child interactions; the child trying to maximize pleasure by satisfying his id, while the parents imposed reality and morality, the ego and the super-ego respectively. Freud considered childhood experiences so important that he believed that "the adult personality was firmly shaped and crystallized by the fifth year of life". (Schultz; 2007:61) The mother's role becomes vital because she possesses the natural nurturing; the maternal instinct makes her desirous of bestowing unconditional love and affection upon her children; "to appreciate and respect the child as a person and derive some enjoyment from the child as a companion; recognize and make allowance for the kinds of childishness a young one manifests because he is still a child; allow a child to lean on [her] for support ; while not fostering dependency." (Jersild et al.1978 :206) Quite naturally, with the mother, as the strongest anchor by his side, the child experiences not only a happy childhood but also a balanced and satisfying adult life.

Psychologist Erich Fromm seems to touch our emotional chords when he says: "Mother's love is Peace. It need not be acquired. It need not be deserved."

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