CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study titled “Literature to Films: A Study of Select Women Protagonists in Hindi Cinema” focuses on celluloid versions of well-known literary work, comprising Hindi cinema and their original texts.

The study has tried to understand the process of transmutation from literature to films with the focus on the portrayal of women protagonists. It has tried to explore the relationship between literature and films, and arrive at a rationally viable understanding of the impact and influence of literature on cinema.

5.2 Objectives identified

The following objectives were identified at the outset, and the study was geared towards meeting them to the extent possible in the course of this research.

1. To highlight the relationship between Cinema and Literature and provide greater insights into the nature of dependence/inter-dependence between the two media.
2. To discuss the inherent contrast as well as compatibility between the two media as modes of expression/communication.
3. To focus on the women-oriented films dealing with a wide spectrum of issues related to women.
4. To investigate the degree of sensitivity revealed by the male directors in handling issues and subjects related to women.
5 To study the emerging women subjectivities as represented in Cinema in post-independence period.

6 To understand the depiction of women protagonists in the literary and cinematic texts from sociological as well as feminists theoretical perspective.

7 To study the impact of various cinematic devices such as flashbacks, mirror images, dreams, motifs, fantasies, songs used by the filmmakers during the process of transmutation.

8 To compare the vision/perspective of filmmaker with that of the author.

5.3 Major findings of the study

Chapter One: Introduction

A survey of Hindi films showed that:

1. Hindi Cinema has been dependent on literature from its inception stage. It is possible to deduce that the progressive agenda in some outstanding authorial works inspired filmmakers. Many contemporary issues such as untouchability, prostitution, widow remarriage, women empowerment were addressed sensitively in several path breaking films over the decades.

2. Interestingly, it was found that in the films, as well as in their source texts, the core issue of the caste system has been inter-connected with the issues related to gender and this depicts the glaring societal reality of our times.

3. It was observed that adaptations mainly based on literary works brought about variety and innovation in the themes of the films. The major feature of the New Wave Cinema and Parallel Cinema has been its dependence on literature. The parallel cinema movement (late 1960s and 1970s) brought about major changes in the substance (themes) and its re-presentation. During this phase,
great literary works were adapted into cinema. Cinema was sensitive to the social needs and aspirations.

4. Hindi films based on literary texts in non-Hindi languages have reflected the regional flavour that goes with the language and context of the original text. However, despite regional variations, the themes related to gender issues have had a universal relevance and country-wide appeal.

5. This study of Hindi Cinema revealed that mainstream cinema portrays the female protagonist as an ideal, virtuous Bhartiya Nari (Indian woman) who adheres to the patriarchal ideology of the society, follows its norms and endures patriarchal excesses until pushed to limit of her freedom. It is observed that ‘image’ of women protagonist has been moulded by the ideologies deep rooted in mythological stories; amplified by the melodramatic form of narration. Therefore, generally, in the mainstream cinema, women characters portrayed are mere ‘fictional constructs’ and do not seem real.

6. Fortunately, a few filmmakers have worked with a missionary zeal to change the situation. They have chosen visionary, literary milestones and endeavoured to provide comparable celluloid versions that highlighted the plight and predicaments of the protagonists ‘authentically’. The intellectual depth of the literary works has been synthesized with the aesthetic appeal in order to create meaningful cinema.

Chapter Two: Transmutation: Literature to Films

1. Film as a ‘text’ very often relies upon the synthesis of a variety of cinematic devices, for ‘transmuting’ a literary work into a celluloid version.

2. The film is often associated with novel for it provides immense scope for the filmmaker to adapt, modify and reconstruct the content of the novel.
3. It is revealed that the degree of fidelity of the transmuted version to the original text varies.

4. It was noted that the film *Teesri Kasam*, far exceeds in its impact; whether artistic or emotive, as compared to the original work *Teesri Kasam Arthaat Mare Gaye Guljam*. In transmuting a literary text such as *Teesri Kasam*, the filmmaker Basu Bhattacharya could reach much beyond the limits of textual portrayal of the protagonist to re-create a female protagonist who can impact audience through her compelling subjectivity by allocating her a greater cinematic as well as emotional space and presence.

5. It was felt that some films are suited to adaptations more easily. Perhaps, ‘adaptability’ is the key factor which is considered by the filmmakers while selecting a story. The screenplay for the film *Sujata* was facilitated by the qualities of detailed observation and description of human relationships brought to the fore by Subodh Ghosh, the author of the short story ‘Sujata’.

6. The study showed that every adaptation cannot and should not be judged solely on the basis of ‘fidelity’. For instance, Kalpana Lajmi, the filmmaker of *Rudaali* has introduced thematic changes in the story, re-creating a story woven around the female protagonist Sanichari. In her story, Mahasweta Devi has emphasized Marxist ideology through discourse focussing on class struggle and gender oppression. She also portrayed how the exploited class respond to oppression by learning to manipulating. Lajmi, on the other hand, underscores the suffering of Sanichari as a tragic icon and focus on the irony of how personal tragedies convert her into a ‘rudali’- a professional mourner.

7. It is discovered that the inherent difference between the two media poses a great challenge of transmutation. It also encourages the use of innovative
techniques in order to highlight the hidden thoughts and emotions. This is especially true in case of female protagonists, because the freedom to express for women is much less as compared to the autonomy enjoyed by men in a patriarchal society like India.

8. Films spatializes time i.e., it uses space for time. For instance, the filmmaker Shyam Benegal uses interior/exterior space as a leitmotif in the film *Bhumika*. The constant use of flashbacks synthesized with the interior/exterior space, drastically alters the perception and the experience of the film viewers. The film appears quirky. *Bhumika* is a suitable example of how the story/narrative evolve from the flashback form.

9. There is a huge gulf between the percept of the visual image vis-à-vis the concept of mental image and therefore, the films rely heavily on a high-pitched emotional drama rather than engaging the audience in a serious intellectual exercise.

10. The film *Pinjar* provides an insight into the aspect of varying time-span. The shortening of the time-period in the film (to about 2-3 years) as compared to the original work (which evolves gradually over a time-span of about 13 years) adversely affects the authentic feel and the rhythm of the film. In the original work *Pinjar*, the relationship between Puro and Rashid appear to be more authentic, believable and mature because of the time-period of more than a decade whereas, the movie hastens to reach the climax which appears unrealistic.

11. It is also realized that the difference in time factor (in texts and films) compels the filmmaker to use a variety of cinematic devices creatively and innovatively. This brings in the element of filmmaker’s subjective choice.
12. It was ascertained that the transmutation devices, such as dreams, motifs, mirror-image, and songs, in the films were instrumental in bringing hidden feelings to the fore and in highlighting the women protagonists (in terms of voice and image) more intensely than in some of the source texts.

13. Flashbacks have been found to be an important part of narratives used in both literature and cinema, especially in autobiographies and biopics based on authors. The two biopic chosen for study, namely, Sangtye Aika and Bandit Queen are based on real-life account. In both the films, flashbacks are used. The story of Bhumika evolves from the flashback mode of narration. The source texts namely Mother (Pearl Buck), Chakra (Jaywant Dalvi), Pinjar (Amrita Pritam) and all the three biopic used flashbacks to a great extent. Thus, it is revealed that flashback can be a handy device for effective analysis of the emerging female subjectivities. This has been done by linking the image, voice of women protagonist with what has been recalled by way of the flashbacks.

14. Dreams/Fantasies have been creatively used to reflect the suppressed desires of the character (mainly the female protagonist). Very often, dreams/fantasies are synthesized with songs, adding to the aesthetic and emotional intensity of the scene. Since most films deal with the marginalized women, these devices are found to be useful in highlighting the thematic concerns.

15. The film Ek Chadar Maili Si uses fantasy with cautions and restraint to protect the integrity of the main characters, namely, Rano, Mangal and Triloka. The grey shades of the human thoughts and emotions are well concealed in this commercial film, although the film is compelled to break the mould of an ‘ideal, fictitious’ portrayal of woman. However, Rajender Singh Bedi’s portrayal of the female protagonist in his literary work is more intense and
credible, whereas the film tends to ignore the psychological ambiguities of the female protagonist.

16. Cinema relies more on ‘action’. As such, dreams ‘shown’ on the celluloid in lieu of thoughts and imagination cannot be depicted without the help of audio-visual scene. It was observed that in films like Pinjar and Rudaali, dreams/fantasies are used as a device to indicate ‘wish fulfilment’ of the female protagonist.

17. Imageries, whether visual or verbal, have been used effectively in the selected works. There are significant examples of how verbal imagery is difficult to translate into visual imagery on the silver screen. For instance, in case of Pinjar, the rich poetic quality of the authorial work poses a great challenge to the filmmaker, who used songs, mirror-images, fantasy in the film.

18. Lyrics of the song create visual imagery, capture the mood of the protagonist/character, reveal his/her feelings, dreams, despair; in short, the very experiences of the character. The study has focused on the songs that are filmed on the female protagonist. Two films selected for this study, namely, Teesri Kasam and Pinjar provide evidence that a good literary works encourage the filmmakers to adopt poetic verses, folksongs into their films in order to provide authenticity to the transmuted narrative. The songs provide voice to the voiceless and are effectively used as a signifier of the emotional make-up, status, situations and the suffering of the women protagonists. Thus, songs form an important sub-text of narrative.

19. Mirror-image tells more than what is visible and reveals significant aspects of the protagonist’s experience. For instance, In Bhumika, the mirror-images are used as a leitmotif to depict Usha’s transition from reel life to real life.
20. It is found that the subdued personalities of the female protagonists such as Sujata, Usha find expression in *exterior space* whereas the *interior space* seems to stifle their feelings.

Elements of nature have always been used to symbolize human emotions. As such, motifs such as like rain, clouds, breeze, flowers, river were aesthetically and purposefully used to reveal the subtle emotions of the female protagonists. The elements of nature are used to signify the hidden feelings of the marginalized; the shy and *silent* female protagonist.

**Chapter 3: Emergent female subjectivities in Hindi Cinema**

1. Analyses of the films wherein the women protagonist have crossed the threshold of the private domain revealed that their oppression in the patriarchal family and society continued. For instance, Usha (*Bhumika*) worked to support her family but her husband continued to exploit her for money. In case of Heerabai (*Teesri Kasam*) and Umrao Jan (*Umrao Jan*), although they are talented and successful, they are still marginalized as women of low repute for the *kind* of professions they persue and also because they are women who are viewed as a *private* property by the capitalistic patriarchal and vested interests.

2. In the films under study, it is noticed that women, prefer not to cross threshold except driven by necessity and circumstances (as in case of Rano, Sanichari), and coercion (Umrao Jan, Usha). Nature of plot in *Sujata* precludes the possibility of her stepping out in the public sphere.

3. Women protagonist chosen for the study highlight the fact that women posses a high degree of ‘Ethic of Care’ as compared to their male counterparts. Whether it is in *Sujata, Mother India, Ek Chadar Maili Si* or *Pinjar*, the
women protagonists (in the texts and the films) reveal attitudes and behaviour consistent with the ‘ethics of Care’, and derive moral strength through an attitude of selfless service and care.

4. In patriarchal societies, women are easy victims of violence. For example, in *Pinjar*, it is the ‘non-identity’ of Puro which haunts the viewers. Puro represents a sense of loss, loneliness and alienation. The oppressive patriarchal society alienates her from hope and happiness. So also, Umraon Jan and Phoolan Devi who were abducted, experience marginalization, loss of self worth and identity.

5. The gender discrimination against Phoolan, Rano, Amma and others is facilitated by the gulf between the *haves and have nots*. The study revealed that patriarchy is strengthened by other power hierarchies and power structures such as Caste system and Class system and these women are doubly subaltern.

6. The experience of women is quite distinct from those of men. The role played by women and the multiple identities they have to assume are much more complex.

7. It was found that, in the study of female subjectivities, biographies particularly autobiographies prove to be a very useful source of authentic information and provide reliable glimpses from the ‘lived reality’ of female subjects.

8. Freudian feminist theories helped interpret the domination and subjugation of females due to the socialization processes and practices. Marxist and Freudian feminist approaches helped to highlight the family as the relational basis for women’s subjugation. Films like *Bhumika, Rudaali* and *Ek Chadar Maili Si* provide evidence of this.
9. Since this study undertook the analyses of the subjectivities of women protagonists from diverse sections of society, the postmodernist approach seemed to be most suitable, since it allows reformulating the epistemological concerns and the discursive nature of female identity and power.

10. The notion of ‘subject in process’ has helped to appreciate the metamorphosis of the women protagonists from the status of victim to a benefactor of other, growing from powerless to empowerment as in the case of Pinjar, Ek Chadar Maili Si and Bandit Queen.

11. It is also discovered that the filmmakers use ‘body as subject’ and high-pitched melodrama (in case of female protagonists) as a powerful means to ensure that movies become more ‘appealing’ to the viewer and commercially successful. The use of male gaze for visual pleasure is a reality and the re-presentation of issues related to the marginalized female subjects like the Bandit Queen are pushed to the back burner.

Chapter 4: Women-centric issues and gender relationship in Hindi Cinema

1. The Village Panchayats depicted as autonomous, tyrannical institutions have complete disregard for the female protagonists and are unjust and oppressive towards them. It is also revealed that the Panchayats are used to silence and stifle the voice of the weak and the meek; be it women, minorities or the subjects from the lower caste or class.

2. Since the re-presentation of Phoolan Devi’s life is marred by so many contradictions, it is impossible to separate fact from fiction. It is realized that the media hype, the depiction of violence and atrocities committed against her has led to a distorted perception of the woman protagonist.
3. The film *Chakra* reveals the anatomy of crime which breeds in the slums like *Dharavi*. The film reveals stark reality and has been made with an agenda of creating social awakening. It is realized that the film was made keeping in view the zeitgeist of the age.

4. The notion of feminine identity, status and power is in keeping with the traditional notion of *pativrata* and not according to the Western Liberal ideas.

5. The man-woman relationship is in most cases guided by the traditional code and is unaffected by the modern ideas.

6. It is indeed female instinct, female way of reasoning and using the experience of the world which helped to transform the situation such as in case of Rano or Puro.

7. In the case of films like *Sujata, Ek Chadar Maili Si, Pinjar*, the filmmakers have acknowledged and depicted the role of women as an agent of social change. The filmmaker has been faithful to the vision of the author.

8. The issue of female bonding, which is hitherto neglected, finds prominence. There are examples of unconventional depiction of female bonding based on ethics of care, compassion unlike the much hyped, stereotypical depictions in the mainstream Hindi Cinema.

**Chapter Five: Conclusion**

1. The films chosen for study in the context of their respective source texts have established considerably that Hindi Cinema has been dependent on literature. All the films studied were classics adaptations from celebrated literary works. The progressive agenda of a given literary work, focusing on the woman protagonist has inspired the filmmakers faithfully adopt authorial vision, for instance, *Sujata.*
2. Issues such as untouchability, domestic violence, abduction, communal violence were depicted sensitively by the filmmakers. All the filmmakers (except Kalpana Lajmi) were male. On the whole, they have portrayed the women protagonists sensitively.

3. Though, both, films and literature deal with ‘telling stories’, nonetheless, it is realized the inherent contrast between the experiences of ‘viewing’ a film is quite different from the personal experience/journey of the reader of a text.

4. The filmmakers deal with the challenge of mutual incompatibility between the two media by creatively using various cinematic devices such as flashbacks, songs, mirror-images, thereby adapting the source text innovatively.

5. The degree of fidelity of the transmuted version to the original text varies. With Sujata and Chakra, posited at one end of spectrum in being extremely close to the original, at the other end stands a timeless masterpiece like Mother India, where merely the baseline of ‘a mother’s lone struggle’ is used by the filmmaker to re-create his own perspective on that womanly saga. Incidentally, its earlier version Aurat is comparatively closer to the original literary work, The Mother.

6. The emerging female subjectivities in Hindi Cinema have brought to the fore the marginal female subjects. Films like Sujata, Pinjar and Bhumika have highlighted the rise of women consciousness. The films reveal the overwhelming presence of patriarchy, (in family relationship as well as in society), its oppressive nature and its impact on women protagonists.

7. The study also reveals that the intellectual core inherent to the original text very often gets ignored and even replaced in the film by emotional components such as melodrama. Being a medium meant for an audience
across the board, and since the vividness of the film medium prompts intense emotional involvement of the audience, the filmmaker is often tempted towards melodrama than a writer of a novel aimed at a selective readership may be required to do.

8. The filmmakers of *Pinjar, Umrao Jan* and *Ek Chadar Maili Si* very often ignored the psychological ambiguities and soliloquy experienced by the women protagonists which have been strongly depicted in the respective source texts. The introspective, self-reflective nature of the women protagonists such as Umrao Jan, Puro, Hansa as depicted in the respective source texts is considerably minimized in the films based on them. This brings to the fore the inherent contrast between ‘words’ and ‘images’.

9. Given the vast material resources it employs, a film is driven by the market more than a literary masterpiece may do or may need to do. Thus market considerations very often sway the cinematic purpose since it is mainly a mass medium and aspires to a consumeristic audience. Example of film *Rudaali* is relevant here.

10. The element of ‘boldness’ of the original literary theme is often erased, in favour of widely accepted ‘images’ of ideal womanhood, in the transmuted cinematic version. For instance, Rano of the literary text *Ek Chadar Maili Si* is more intense and believable than its film version.

11. In some films, the gender-related issues are seen to be well synthesized with caste and class based ones. Films such as *Rudali* and *Bandit Queen* provide adequate scope for understanding the complex dynamics of caste, class and gender.
12. The films selected for study also provided scope for the depiction of female bonding, which had been a hitherto neglected aspect in Hindi Cinema.

13. Cinematic devices such as dreams, songs, fantasy, and motifs prove to be more impactful in films rather than mere verbal devices like dialogue, for they help provide, both a distinct ‘voice’ and a vivid ‘image’ to the women protagonists, by underscoring the psychological drives, individual aspirations and personal frustrations which constitute their subjectivities.

14. Most of the female protagonists in the selected works have helped to create a distinct image of female subjectivity. But the binaries between the male and the female, the issue of male gaze, and body politics need to be addressed with greater emphasis and sensitivity towards the female protagonists.

**Relevance of this study:**

The present research work was aimed at studying the ‘transmutation’ of literary text into films. It focused on the female protagonist as the core component to understand, interpret and highlight the ‘transmutation’ that occurs in adapting a literary text into a celluloid one. In this process, this study undertook an analysis of emerging female subjectivities as the criteria to assess the authenticity of cinematic version. It also analysed and assessed women-centric issues and gender relationships as portrayed in Hindi cinema.

In being one of its kind, this study expects to contribute modestly to an area hitherto unexplored by others.