This chapter presents the portrayal of women characters from the selected films. First, the present chapter will analyse two films, Mr. & Mrs. 55 (1955) and Mother India (1957), selected from the period of 1950 to 1960. The subsequent sections will then present the analysis from selected films of 1970 to 2000.

4.1 Analysis of selected films from 1950 to 1960

After a long and bitter freedom struggle, India achieved independence in 1947. India of 1947 was about hope, future and dreams. There was much to achieve – wounds to heal and progress to make. The optimism of the era embodied by the first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (who served from 1947 to 1964), led to a revitalized Hindi cinema. Much like the country that yearned to leave the old times and enter the era of growth and development, the Hindi cinema also did its utmost to balance entertainment with social commentary.

During the fifties, India was facing a lot of social, political, financial and religious challenges. “The British had left behind an inimical legacy – a country divided along class, caste and religious lines, and living in desperate poverty. The wounds of partition were still raw” (Somaaya et al., 2012). Films made in this era were showing not only what existed in the society but also how the society could get rid of these social evils. The period was marred both by uncertainty and hope, and India was simultaneously trying to build a new identity and discard its colonial past. The people believed that in an independent India, old promises would be fulfilled and new changes will bring about prosperity, equality and a better life for the common people.

Cinema of this period took socially relevant subject in films, such as Bimal Roy’s Do Bigha Zameen (1953), Sujata (1959), Mehboob Khan’s Mother India (1957), Raj Kopoor’s Awaara (1951) and Shree 420 (1955) and Guru Dutt’s Pyaasa (1957). These films took social theme as a plot of the film and weaved the entire story around it, and finally proffered a solution in the climax, hence crafting their own imagined India through their films.

The oft-quoted adage, “Cinema is the mirror of society,” applies aptly to the era after Independence. Indian cinema often depicted the Indian society that has changed drastically since the last 60 years. Whether it was the landlord era of early
1940s or the abolishment of various social evils and obstacles, cinema in a way projected the growth of a great nation. After independence, cinema was depicting the society of that era.

Hindi cinema of this era tried to capture the spirit of the times, to liberate the society of the ills prevailing at the time, to be a part of the new social awakening. The mythological films of pre-independence era became history and renewed attempts at combining entertainment and social relevance in the cinema continued even after Independence. Although the censor board created during the British period remained, movie makers now enjoyed greater liberty in making political and social films than they had in pre-independence era. Technically, the world of cinema had advanced quite a bit and this was reflected in Indian cinema too. The story tellers active during this phase displayed an acute awareness of the changes taking place in world cinema. Combined with this were optimism, determination and a resolve to do something entirely different. Satyajit Ray, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor and Mehboob Khan were the main movie makers of the post-independence period who based their cinema on social pragmatism, aesthetic intricacy and healthy entertainment.

The beginning of this decade witnessed significant developments related to cinema in India, such as the establishment of Central Board of Film Censors in 1951 and the formation of Film Federation of India in the same year (Somaaya et al., 2012). The fifties also saw the slow crumbling of the studio systems of the past and the establishment of Mumbai (then Bombay) as the centre for film production. The finest of directors and actors populated this era and their combined work has resulted in referring to the fifties as the golden age of Hindi cinema.

4.1.1 Mr. & Mrs. 55 (1955), Directed by Guru Dutt

Guru Dutt is not only known as a fine actor of his generation, but also holds the reputation of a refined director. Known for his cinematographic techniques, clever use of shadows and silhouettes, Dutt has left a lasting legacy in Hindi cinema. Two of his directed movies – Pyaasa (1957) and Kaagaz Ke Phool (1959) – have been listed in the Time magazine’s ‘All-Time 100 Best Movies” (Corlis, 2010). Two of his works, Mr. & Mrs. 55 (1955) and Pyaasa (1957), narrate the issue of unemployment and youth’s disenchantment with the newly independent India. The disillusionment with the new born country is best captured in Pyaasa, where attired in tattered clothing and
visibly drunk, the character of Vijay (Guru Dutt) roams in the lanes of a red light area and sings one of the immortal songs of Hindi cinema: ‘Kahan hain, kahan hain muhafiz khudi ke, Jinhen naaz hai hind par woh kahan hain’. The song roughly translates as ‘where, o where are the preservers of pride! those who’re proud of the India, where are they?’

Set in the Bombay of 1950s, Mr. & Mrs. 55 can be classified as a socially critical comedy. The film narrates the story of an unsuccessful cartoonist Preetam (Guru Dutt), who is looking for a job and his attempts at finding a livelihood are in vain, he lives at a rented accommodation with his friend Johnny (played by Johnny Lever) and is dependent on him for his day to day expenses. Preetam meets Anita (Madhubala) at a tennis match. Anita is a wealthy and westernized woman who lives under the strict control of her martinet aunt (Lalita Pawar). The aunt not only controls every aspect of Anita but is also shown as a feminist activist who is apparently fighting for women’s rights. Anita’s home is a meeting point of likeminded women who all are caricatured as misandrists. The film’s plot picks up pace when it is revealed that Anita’s father has left a large fortune for her. The fortune comes with a caveat that Anita must marry within a month after her twentieth birthday. This puts her aunt, who is against men and marriage, in a fix. Seeta Devi, the aunt engineers a sham marriage between Anita and Preetam, where a financially broke Preetam will receive money in lieu of her marriage with Anita. However, Preetam has to divorce Anita whenever the aunt decrees. Initially, Preetam refuses, citing reasons of self-respect, but as soon as he discovers that Anita is the same beautiful woman he met at a tennis match he readily agrees, clearly besotted by her beauty. Anita and Preetam are married at the office of the marriage registrar and part their ways. Soon after the marriage, Preetam discovers that he indeed loves her and tries to convince her of his feelings. Anita, however, is disgusted by a man who agreed to sell himself. In order to convince Anita that he truly loves her, he engineers a kidnapping-like situation and takes her to his village. At this time, it is revealed that Preetam comes from a village. No other character from his rural home is introduced except his sister-in-law. The sister-in-law is portrayed as a simple woman from village whose sole salvation in life lies in household chores and married life. The meeting between Anita and the sister-in-law convinces Anita that she too wants to be married and is interested in a blissful married life. The romantic interlude is interrupted by the aunt who comes to take
away Anita and asks Preetam for the divorce, as agreed before the marriage. Preetam wants to continue with the marriage but the aunt reminds him harshly of the agreement and takes Preetam to the court. The divorce trial becomes the talk of the town and attracts a lot of media attention. The case, however, clearly is going in the aunt’s favour. The judge adjourns the court for one day. Frustrated by the humiliation Preetam receives in the court, he decides to leave the city. Meanwhile, Anita has decided that she really loves Preetam and rushes to the airport. The film ends with the happy couple leaving the airport.

While the film has been made as a comedy, it clearly leaves several messages. The caricaturing of the women who fight for women’s rights is the first one. The film opens with a newspaper hawker announcing the news related to a divorce bill. The scene cuts to an excited Anita Devi who gives a monologue on how the society has been ruled by men and how the right to divorce is an essential right of every woman. While Anita Devi is busy delivering the lecture on women’s rights, the scene is juxtaposed with shots of other women who have come to attend the meeting. The other women in the meeting are busy discussing various home treatments for beauty. While the director has attempted to create humour by showing women talking about their rights and beauty treatments simultaneously, it actually appears an attempt to trivialize and belittle women fighting for their rights. It is pertinent to note that the Hindu Code bill was discussed and passed in the same decade the film was released. As Majumdar (2003) notes

Posters advertising ‘Mr And Mrs 55’, a popular Hindi film released in 1955, starkly captured contemporary perceptions on the role of women in the years immediately following the independence of India. 1955-56 are memorable years in the annals of an Indian ‘modernity’ as sections of the famous Hindu Code Bill…were codified as law during this time. (p. 2130)

Further, Majumdar (2003) explains the poster of the film. One part of the poster showed the hero buckling the actress’s shows while she is attired in western style clothing. The other side, has the same actress clad demurely in saree, at the hero’s feet.
The film, in order to establish Anita as a ‘modern’ woman uses her sartorial style. In the scene where she is introduced to the audience, she is wearing shorts. The setting too is important, as she is watching a tennis match. The implication being as a ‘westernized’ woman she takes interest in sports. While Anita cares for her future husband and is at the same time vehemently opposed to the idea of somebody marrying her in return of money, her aunt, who is the vamp of the story, explains to her that a caring husband is not important, what matters is the money she will get after the divorce. Anita’s aunt, the feminist activist, has been bestowed with all the negative characteristics the filmmakers could muster. The aunt is not only a heartless and a materialistic woman, she also hates all men and expects her niece (Anita) to be the same. The director simply affirmed the prejudices that even existed in 1950s with respect to the nascent feminist movement in India that all women fighting for their rights are cold-hearted, cruel and money-minded women who are against the idea of marriage and whose sole purpose in life is to belittle and torment men.

Anita continually derides Preetam for accepting money for the sham marriage, the great transformation in Anita comes when she meets the sister-in-law of Preetam. It is the character of the sister-in-law (Kumkum) who appears in the last hour of the film that has been created to manufacture contrast with Anita. While Anita has been kept in an urban setting, the sister-in-law has been placed in a rural one. In the first scene when the two women meet, Kumkum says to Anita ‘what other wealth could a woman want then her own home?’ The message here is clear and explicit, while Anita – the modern and westernized woman is after material wealth, the sister-in-law, a simple rustic woman, considers her husband to be her greatest ‘wealth’. To create a ‘westernized’ Anita and a ‘rural’ sister-in-law, the director as mentioned earlier, resorts to clothes. Anita is usually wearing the ‘modern’ clothes of the era, the sister-in-law is demurely clad in a saree. Mr. & Mrs. 55 not only creates a western versus Indian ideals dichotomy but also creates a rich versus poor binary. This is evident from many dialogue exchanges between Preetam and Seeta Devi and in also in a dialogue exchange between Preetam and his sister-in-law. She contrasts the poor people as having ‘goodness and character’ while the rich people, according to her, are simply rich and lack such virtues.

Anita, a woman who enjoys socializing and sports, is suddenly impressed when she observes Pretam’s sister-in-law doing various household tasks. In one scene
while the sister-in-law is involved in doing chores, Anita asks her to try the work and says that only through practice will she learn to maintain a household. The film does not offer any tangible explanation as to why the woman of a city who does not know a thing about housekeeping is suddenly interested in tedious works being done by a rural woman. The only explanation is the existence of the character of the sister-in-law who has been manufactured to create a portrayal of the ‘perfect’ wife and the ‘perfect’ mother. The dialogue exchange between Anita and the Kumkum is important to understand the filmmaker’s attempt to create the image of the ‘perfect’ woman. Explaining the virtues of a home inhabited by the workaholic wife, Kumkum explains to Anita that a housewife does not get tired by the work she does, instead she, the housewife, ‘finds peace in the housework’. When Anita enquires about her health after having three children in four years and says that a ‘woman loses her freedom’ giving birth to one child after another, the sister-in-law quickly retorts: ‘a woman who considers her children a burden, how can she be called a woman!’ While Anita is asking all the pertinent questions about marriage, the sister-in-law affirms the belief that the primary role of a mother in a household is fecundity and reproduction. Raising the issue of domestic violence, Anita asks a personal question: ‘does your husband ever hit you? Kumkum replies in affirmation and adds, ‘after all he loves me so sincerely’. In order to further justify the beating she may have suffered at the hands of her husband, she provides an analogy: ‘when you eat rice, some time you come across little stones, that does not mean you stop eating it’. Immediately after the exchange of dialogues between the sister-in-law and Anita, a romantic song ensues. The song is the representation of Anita’s final confirmation of her feelings towards Preetam. The message is clear: whatever doubts the city-bred Anita had about marriage, have evaporated after seeing the virtues of being a wife and a prospective mother. She is now ready to commit herself to romance and a future marriage.

The film defines two kinds of women – first represented by Anita and her aunt are the ones who live in a city and have all the amenities and comforts and the second represented by the sister-in-law, living in a village and only interested in household chores. The city-bred women are portrayed in the film as educated who socialize and do all the things that is expected from a ‘modern’ woman. This is not only reflected in their demeanour but also in the clothes they wear. While these women may fight for women’s rights, in reality they hate men and are opposed to marriage. Moreover, they
are only interested in materialistic things and do not possess a ‘strong character’. These women, as put by Preetam in an exchange with Seeta Devi, think that a ‘a husband is wife’s slave’. The second type of women are symbolized by Preetam’s sister-in-law. These women are selfless and think only of their husband and children. They do not complain about heavy household chores and are content with whatever they have. Moreover, they are perfectly fine with any domestic violence they may have to face. They exist for men and are defined by men. They do not possess any identity except that of a wife or a mother.

Mr. & Mrs. 55 may be remembered as a light-hearted comedy but ultimately the film is about the clash between the women as defined by the society and the women who are deemed to be ‘western’ and ‘modern’. It is the ‘traditional’ woman symbolized by Preetam’s sister-in-law who wins, and the ‘modern’ woman as depicted by Anita who loses her identity and ultimately becomes the woman who is content with being a wife as defined by society.

4.1.2  

Mother India (1957), Directed by Mehboob Khan

Written and directed by Mehboob Khan and starring Nargis, Sunil Dutt, Rajendra Kumar and Raj Kumar, Mother India’s status, writes Thomas (1989), “in Indian cinema mythology and popular consciousness is legendary.” Considered as a descendent of Mehboob Khan’s earlier film Aurat (1940), Mother India is considered as an iconic and important film of Hindi cinema and is India’s first submission to Academy Awards in 1958 in the best Foreign Language Film Category. The film is not only renowned in Indian film industry but also abroad:

Mother India, in fact, has had considerable acclaim from Western audiences over the years—probably more than any other mainstream Indian film. It received an Oscar nomination in 1958, patronizing but generally favorable reviews at its London release in 1961, and a flood of enthusiastic letters following its first transmission on British television in 1983. (Thomas, 1989, p. 1)

Based in rural India as a metaphor of an independent nation rising on its own after the collapse of the British Empire, the film starts with visuals of an old Radha (Nargis) sitting in a field. The scene continues with a dam being constructed and ends with
Radha being called by a group of villagers to inaugurate a water canal, while tractors and other agricultural implements are shown in the background. The scene is complemented with a song that praises ‘Mother Earth’. The necessity of dams as articulated by Jawahar Lal Nehru and the intense desire of the country to become self-dependent in food grains production during the early years of India are themes that are subtly hinted in the opening scene.

The film is essentially the story of a poor peasant woman, Radha, and the misfortunes that befall her and her family after Radha’s mother-in-law takes loan from the village money lender for her son’s marriage. As it often happens in plots involving loans and debts, the conditions of the loans are disputed, and Radha and Shamu (Raj Kumar) are forced to sell a portion of their yield as interest per year. The family is forced into penury and the situation is exacerbated after Shamu meets an accident while working on the barren lands, losing both his hands. Unable to live with the humiliation of a dependent living, Shamu one day leaves the family and disappears. The filmmakers continue to torment Radha by introducing one misfortune after the other. While Radha is coping with the unfortunate departure of his husband, her youngest son and mother-in-law die, leaving her stricken with grief and pain. Adding to Radha’s misfortunes, the village is struck with a severe storm and floods that destroy houses and the harvest. The villagers are traumatized by the losses and decide to migrate. Radha passionately pleads the villagers to stop leaving. This persuades the villagers to stay and rebuild the village. Death is not done with Radha’s family and she loses her fourth son to the storm and confusion that ensues. Meanwhile, the village money lender tries to take advantage of Radha’s situation and offers her food and money in exchange of sexual favours. Radha is aghast at the crude proposition and vehemently refuses the offer. At this point, the film takes a time leap. Radha’s son Birju (Sunil Dutt) and Ramu (Rajendra Kumar) have grown up and the younger of the two brothers, that is Birju, embittered since childhood has become aggressive and often confronts the cunning and devious money lender who is still getting the interest from the loan. Birju is suspicious of the money lender’s account keeping and asks for the ledgers, but is unable to read since he is illiterate. Frustrated by his inability to get back her mother’s bangle from the money lender that were pawned years ago, he tries to steal them. Birju, after the attempted theft is beaten and chased by the villagers. Birju steals a gun and attempts to kill the money lender but
his attempts are thwarted. He leaves the village after a long scene of fights, fire and chaos, only to return as a bandit. The bandit Birju has threatened to kidnap the money lender’s daughter. He returns to the village and takes his revenge by killing the cruel money lender and burning his ledger accounts. He proceeds to abduct his daughter and is stopped by his elder brother Ramu. In the fight that ensues, Birju succeeds in capturing the daughter who pleads to Radha to stop Birju. Radha, in the climax of the film kills Birju, thereby saving the daughter whom she has declared to be the ‘honour’ of the village. The film ends with Radha being asked by the villagers to inaugurate the canal.

The film primarily categorizes Radha in two roles, that of a wife and a mother. These are arguably the most important roles that Hindi cinema bestows upon women, time and again. When a young and beautiful Radha enters the home of her husband, she is bedecked with jewels and red clothes, symbolizing a newly married woman. At the first meeting of the husband and the wife, Radha falls at the feet of her husband. Radha’s prostration symbolizes the adulation that married women are supposed to have for their husbands. It also acts as a cue for all married women that the husband is equivalent to ‘pati-parmeshwar’, which literally translates to ‘husband-god’. The husband, in other words, is a demi-god to be worshiped and revered at all times. The wife happy at the feet of her husband became a recurring theme in the portrayal of wives in the Hindi films of the future. The film begins by showing Radha as a married woman, making no mention of her previous life or home. As Kazmi (2010) explains, “Radha’s identity is etched out only in relation to her husband (Raj Kumar). With no history, and with all past markers erased, she is indexed as just a ‘wife’.”

Radha’s portrayal as a mother has been infused with traits that Hindi cinema would time and again use in the construction of the archetype mother, namely an absolutely altruistic behaviour, and sacrificing nature. The image of an anguished Nargis literally crucified on the cross of Indian virtue turned into a yoke that female characters in Hindi films had to bear for decades. Sadly, Mother India has been less attractive as the Survivor than as the Sacrificing Woman. After Mehboob Khan’s blockbuster, the saleability of anguished motherhood resulted in shallow clones where the mother’s courage and survival instincts were watered down. (Somaaya et al., 2012, p. 20)
Also, in a relatively short time, Radha is shown with three young children, reiterating the belief that the primary role of the bride is procreation and the extension of the family. Traditionally, procreation and service are considered as the two most important characteristics of an Indian marriage (Bumiller, 1991). Another important observation from the film is that Radha has no daughters. The woman who has been honoured with the title of ‘Mother India’- an ‘icon’, and an example for the future mothers of Hindi cinema does not have a single daughter. A mother can only be a mother to her sons, not to her daughters. The birth of a daughter in the family of Radha and Shamu would not fit in the narrative of the ‘ideal mother’ who is the embodiment of the mother imagined in the Indian tradition and culture. Moreover, as discussed in this work previously, the mother is invariably depicted with relation to her son, while fathers are reserved for their relation to daughters.

In a telling scene, Radha is shown cradling her new born, while the rest of the family eats. Nobody asks Radha to eat or even care as to how much food is left. This seems important considering the family is portrayed to be living under limited means and food. When everybody departs, Radha begins her meal, only to be stopped by her children who are still hungry, and proceeds to finish what is left of the food. The film imparts the message that it is ‘normal’ for a mother to forsake food for her children. The husband, however, is never shown to have this obligation. Clearly, the husband could also have done so. It is a long-standing tradition in Indian families and the families of Indian subcontinent that the women of the family, especially the young women, eat separately and eat last (Khondker, 1996 cited in Sugden et al., 2014; “Women eat last”, n.d.). While a woman in a household is expected to do all the chores, her health is not a concern for other family members. In a study conducted on the rural women of Maharashtra, titled ‘Why are rural Indian women so thin? Findings from a village in Maharashtra’, the authors (Chorghade, Barker, Kanade & Fall, 2006) concluded that a combination of reasons, namely isolation of the young women from their families, expectations of early motherhood, an increased workload, responsibility for the heaviest household chores, a feeling of responsibility for the family, are responsible for the ill health of the young woman and young brides.

Throughout the film, Radha has been characterized as the ‘ideal’ and an obedient wife who is even physically assaulted by her husband. Although her husband is of loving and caring nature, in a moment of rage caused by the poverty-like
situation in the family, he beats his wife who does not even protest. The assault is almost invisible in the plot and makes no addition to the story line. Jejeebhoy (1998) writing about the widespread phenomenon of wife beating in India comments that “In most of India, both north and south, and among both Hindus and Muslims, the family is patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal” and women in these regions are “defined as inferior: husbands are assumed to ‘own’ women, and have the right to dominate them, including through the use of force. Domestic violence is thus deeply embedded in patriarchal norms and attitudes about gender relation in India”. It is important to note that Radha is not only beaten by her husband but also by her son Birju. The physical assault on Radha by her husband and her son is taken for granted and has almost no bearing on the plot, suggesting that it is ‘normal’ for a woman, both as a wife and as a mother to be at the receiving end of physical violence.

Due to the pernicious activities of the landlord cum money lender, the family is forced to work on barren fields. Radha provides full support to her husband and works besides him in clearing the fields. There are multiple shots of Radha working like a labourer drenched in sweat – a stark departure from the coy and delicate bride that once entered the household. In the film we find

Radha constructed though a number of partial and, at times, conflicting representations that refer to a spectrum of archetypes of ideal femininity in Indian culture, and the figure appears to operate as a terrain on which a notion of “the ideal Indian woman” is negotiated. (Thomas, 1999, p.16)

Radha begins her day with extremely hard work in the fields, followed by household chores and preparing of meals for her husband and kids, and finally massaging the legs of her husband. Despite being equally tired, she simply slumps into sleep while sitting at the feet of her husband. Radha is shown as the selfless woman whose sole purpose in life is to serve her husband and children. After the departure of her husband, Radha takes up full responsibility of the household including toiling on the fields. We again see multiple shots of Radha engaged in back-breaking work, albeit this time her children are also involved. As soon as Radha’s husband leaves, her role of a wife comes to end and she transitions to that of a mother.
One of the most important scenes in the film is when Radha shoots and kills her son Birju. The reason cited in the film is that Birju kidnapped the money lender’s daughter and the daughter has been declared to be the ‘honour’ of the entire village by Radha. In the final scene, Radha threatens Birju with death if he does not release the daughter, to which Birju replies “you cannot kill me, you are my mother.” Radha’s reply is affirmation of her status as the mother of the entire village and that of a nation, and she says “I am a woman.” Virdi (2003) explains Radha’s action: “Mother India offers a spectacular twist on the traditional mother-son narrative, offering up a figure who is at once a sacrificing mother and a phallic annihilator”.

While Radha’s entire life was spent sacrificing and suffering one misfortune after another, in the end we see her being called by the villagers to inaugurate the village canal. “The suffering woman is held up as a model of womanhood – idolized, honored and decorated. In a fantastic and wholly fabricated gesture, the films have the son/state recognize the mother’s martydom, making her sacrifices “worth it” (Virdi, 2003). The invitation by the villagers is the recognition Radha gets as ‘Mother India’; it is the result of countless sacrifices. Her life has been an endless ordeal. As a prize of this, she gets to be crowned with the title of ‘Mother India’. Radha’s trials and tribulations have been glorified and exalted. She has been created to pay homage to the ‘mother’ imagined in India, mainly Hindu religious texts. While India has a long and rich tradition of celebrating the mother both in literature and religion, it does not actually result in the empowerment of the woman as a mother. As Krishnaraj (2010) mentions in *Motherhood in India: Glorification Without Empowerment?*, women are seduced by ideology to accept motherhood as an essential part of their lives, and the “normative glorification of motherhood in Indian religious traditions, poetry and prose rarely translates itself into reality in the lives of the mothers.”

4.2 Analysis of selected films from 1960 to 1970

While filmmakers were experimenting with colour as early as the 1930s, it was in 1960s that colour arrived on cinema screen earnestly. The arrival of colour breathed new life in the song and dance routines Bollywood is so fond of. They became more lively and vibrant. If the 1950s were remembered for the socially conscious films, the 1960s gave one romantic film after another. Though the filmmakers made films on diverse subjects, “by far the sixties will be remembered as
the decade of the romantic musicals – love stories set in exotic hill stations and set to scintillating music” (Somaaya et al., 2012). The relationship between man and woman became the central focus of this era. The nation-building narratives of the past were gone and the decade “saw the upbeat, optimistic mood of a new generation of Indians” (Somaaya et al., 2012).

This decade was influenced by the western culture and hence the cinema of this phase had a westernized touch in visual treatment. The hero was mostly foreign return rich gentleman, clad in suites, who came back to his country after receiving higher education, a trend which was later followed by many directors in their films, and is still very much popular. In the films of 1950s, the woman acted as the conscience of the man, his saviour and his archangel. Female characters of sixties relatively came out of the boundaries set by society and culture,

with the onset of the sixties, there seems to be a sudden inversion of identities, with women daring to break free from the straightjacket confines of socially prescribed ‘normal’ behavior. It is this ‘abnormality’ in their character traits which triggers off process that threaten to dismantle the carefully built institutional foundations. (Kazmi, 2010, p. 144)

Due to the vast number of films made every year, it is difficult to typecast Hindi cinema in terms of decades; however, apart from concentrating on romantic musicals, the 1960s “films were often unashamedly upper-middle class, and showed the luxury of plush living rooms with grand pianos, richly upholstered sofas and carpets, fancy cradle telephones, clubs and parties, dancing, picnics and hill stations” (Gooptul, 2012). This era also gave the Indian audience their own Elvis Presley, Shammi Kapoor, whose gymnast antics in songs will always be remembered. Hollywood had a profound influence on Hindi films in this time period, and actors such as Dev Anand were known to be influenced by Hollywood stars.

The films of this era can be classified as pure ‘entertainers’. However, they were not without a subtext. This was a time when Nehruvian optimism gave way for the harsh realities of a struggling nation. Though films were yet to depict the popular discontent of the 1970s, the films created a fantasy land for the lay audience who revealed in the visual beauty provided on screen. Films made in this phase took the
audience away from the dry and harsh realities of village life to the glamorous life of the cities. The cosmopolitanism of the future decades, especially of the post 2000 era, took root in this time.

4.2.1 *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam* (The Master, The Wife and the Slave, 1962) directed by Abrar Alvi

Directed by the noted screen writer Abrar Alvi, *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam* is an adaptation of Bimal Mitra’s Bengali novel *Saheb Bibi Golam*. The film was a huge success at the box office and won four Filmfare Awards, including Best Movie award, and was nominated for the Golden Bear at the 13th Berlin International Film Festival, and was chosen as India’s official entry to the Oscars. The black and white masterpiece is also considered as actress Mena Kumari’s one of the finest works. The film is still viewed as a Bollywood benchmark of brilliant scripting and hypnotic cinematography (Bose, 2006).

The film is told from the point-of-view of Bhootnath (Guru Dutt), an engineer/architect who is overseeing work at a dilapidated mansion. While he roams in the rubble, the story goes back in time and is told in a flashback. A young and naïve Bhootnath arrives from a village to colonial Kolkata (Calcutta). One of his relatives works at a mansion owned by rich and royal landlords. He gets accommodation at the servant quarters and starts to work at a vermillion factory (*Mohini Sindoor* Factory) nearby. The factory is owned by a dedicated member of Brahmo Samaj (a 19th century Hindu reformist movement) member, Subinay Babu (Nazir Hussain), who has a beautiful and chirpy daughter called Jaba (Waheeda Rehman). Bhootnath soon discovers that the mansion is haunted by a melodious voice. To his surprise, the voice belongs to Chhoti Bahu (Meena Kumari), the beautiful but melancholic daughter-in-law of the family. As he is initiated in the luxurious and decadent lifestyles of the household members, he discovers that the womenfolk live a secluded life, confined in the four walls of the mansion and are content with the comforts (except Chhoti Bahu) that come from being members of a landlord family. The men of the mansion – namely Manjhiy Sarkar (Middle Brother, played by D.K. Sapru) and Chhote Sarkar (the youngest brother, played by Rehman) – live a life that has become synonymous with the last nawabs and the debauched royalty of pre-independence India as depicted in films and literature.
The vermillion from the factory where Bhootnath works is supposed to have magic-like qualities and can apparently unite lovers and can reignite love. In order to avail the properties of the product, Chhoti Bahu calls Bhootnath and asks her to bring her the vermillion. This marks the first meeting between the two. The film also reveals the character of Badi Bahu or the eldest daughter-in-law of the family. Badi Bahu is a widow, whose husband passed away a long time ago. Her character does not have any meaningful role in the story except to introduce to the audience the cruelties a widow has to suffer in a traditional Hindu family marred by orthodox customs. Badi Bahu herself is shown as an orthodox woman who spends her time following various rites and rituals. In one scene, she is seen washing her hands repeatedly because she has been rendered ‘impure’ after coming in contact with a crow.

After Bhootnath and Chhoti Bahu develop a friendly relationship, she reveals the reasons behind her constant sadness – while Chhoti Bahu deeply loves her husband and constantly seek his companionship, her husband does not care about her at all and indulges in alcohol and the company of other women all the time. Chhoti Bahu confronts her husband about his constant absence from the house. He makes it clear that it is wine and pleasure he seeks and challenges her to dance and sing like a courtesan. The biggest challenge he poses in front of her is to drink. The idea of a traditional upper-class Hindu woman drinking leaves Chhoti Bahu aghast. But she is adamant about pleasing her husband and excepts the challenge. She asks Bhootnath to fetch alcohol for her.

Meanwhile, Bhootnath gets a job in other town and comes to meet Chhoti Bahu, to his horror, she has taken the bottle with a vengeance and is inebriated all the time. Another development in Bhootnath’s life is related to Jaba, for whom he has developed romantic aspirations. He discovers that her marriage has been fixed to somebody else. He leaves the town and slowly through hard work finds success in his career. At this point, the film takes a time-leap. The household staffs of the mansion lament the disappearing of the traditional artefacts of the zamindari system. There are subtle hints at industrialization and modernization, which have started to take a toll on the traditional manner of life. In order to survive the harsh realities of the time, the men of the family struck a financial deal related to mines. They do not care to examine the details of the agreement and instead spend their time in indulging in useless hobbies.
Bhootnath returns to find that the former landlords are living a life of penury. The mansion itself has lost its former glory and is in a dilapidated state. Chhoti Bahu has turned completely alcoholic and does not even have money to buy liquor. Her husband is bedridden after getting injured in a scuffle. Chhoti Bahu has learned that there is a holy man in a nearby town who has healing powers. Believing that the hermit has the capability to heal her bedridden and paralytic husband, she seeks Bhootnath’s help to meet him. While Bhootnath and Chhoti Bahu leave at night to meet the hermit, they are spotted by Manjhle Babu and his henchmen. The late night departure is interpreted by Manjhle Babu as a sign of a romantic relationship between Bhootnath and Chhoti Bahu. He looks menacingly at them, and in the next scene we see Bhootnath and Chhoti Bahu’s coach being waylaid by Manjhle Babu’s men. While Chhoti Bahu’s fate is not clear at this moment, Bhootnath is shown recuperating in a hospital. The film cuts back to its opening scene where an aged Bhootnath is overseeing work at the mansion. The crew soon discovers a grave, and unearths a skeleton, which is immediately recognized by Bhootnath as Chhoti Bahu’s, as there is some jewellery with the skeleton that belonged to Chhoti Bahu. The film ends with a macabre visual. The shots of Chhoti Bahu are juxtaposed with that of the skeleton. In the voice over, Chhoti Bahu refers herself as Sati Laxmi.

The film has two parallel stories running together – one between Bhootnath and Jaba, which is marked by playfulness, banter and light romance. The other between Bhootnath and Chhoti Bahu, where a timid and naïve Bhootnath discovers the melancholic lonely wife. The film itself takes considerable time in revealing the character of Chhoti Bahu. Her first appearance has been constructed in an interesting manner,

The build up to the moment when we first see Chhoti Bahu is reminiscent of Carol Reed’s introduction of Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in The Third Man (1949). In a marvelously staged sequence, the camera takes Bhoothnath’s POV and follows the pattern of a rich carpet on which he walks to enter the room. His eyes are lowered and he is terrified of meeting her. We hear Chhoti Bahu still off-screen telling him to be seated. Then we see a pair of adorned feet walk across the room. As Bhoothnath sits humbly on the floor, he is asked his name. As Chhoti Bahu asks him what sort of a name is
Bhoothnath, he looks up. The camera tracks in dramatically and holds on a close-up of Chhoti Bahu. Her aura startles Bhoothnath (and us) and from that first look, he (and us) becomes forever her ‘slave.’ It is a magical moment in the film. (Bali, n.d.)

In the very first scene depicting Chhoti Bahu, we see the camera slowly pan from the feet, upwards to the face. Her feet are dyed with aalta (a dye called Rose Bengal is applied by married women of India and Bangladesh on their feet), and she is bedecked with jewellery and sports a big bindi and her head is covered, all symbols of a traditional married woman. It is important to note that Chhoti Bahu is never seen without these traditional markers of a married woman. Right from the first scene where she is revealed to the audience to the last scene of the film, we see her as a perfectly attired wife. The camera is used for the purpose of highlighting her identity as a married woman. There are several close-ups of her bindi-adorned forehead.

The film ultimately is about the decadent lifestyle of colonial era zaminadars (feudal lords). It takes a scathing look at the feudal families of pre-independence India

Sahab Bibi Aur Ghulam [sic] captured the decadence of a crumbling feudal family, undoubtedly offering the first disturbing glimpse in to the life of a bored housewife doomed to monotony, a subject later exploited by Satyajit Ray in Charulata. The lonely housewife obviously wanted more than just making and breaking ornaments. She wanted self-expression! (Somaaya, 2001)

The film takes several measures to establish the decadent lifestyles and debauched characters of the men of the family. They are interested in courtesans and spend their time with them. Money is not a concern and they spend extravagantly. Alcoholism is a way of life – and they spend their nights drunk, waking late in the morning. Their times are either spent with other women or indulging in silly hobbies. Wives or the women of the household simply do not exist for them, and they treat them with contempt and hostility all the time. It is in such a setting that Chhoti Bahu is placed. While the film is an attempt to criticize the life and times of a feudal family in pre-independence era, it does so by creating a woman character that is sacrificed at the altars of a patriarchal family.
Chhoti Bahu in *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam* is constantly seeking the time and attention of her husband. The husband is so thoroughly devoid of emotions towards his wife that despite living under one roof, days pass without the two of them meeting. Chhoti Bahu is literally confined within the walls of the mansion and has to resort to the servants in order to arrange meetings with either her husband or with Bhootnath. She is powerless and dependent on others.

The film not only relies on attire and markers of a traditional wife as symbolized by Chhoti Bahu, but pays great attention to the religious nature of the protagonist. *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam*, at several instances, shows Chhoti Bahu following one traditional ritual or the other. At several places, we see her praying to the deity. She is also a great believer of husband-centric rites, such as keeping a fast for the health and wellbeing for the spouse. In one scene, while she is on fast, she asks the servant to take a small bowl of water to her husband. She cannot break her fast, until she drinks the same water after it is dipped in her husband’s toe. The cruelty of the husband is established, when he refuses to oblige the servant for such a trivial task. The servant is only able to do the job after he falls asleep. The fast is mentioned at one more instance when she tells the cook not to prepare her meal as she would fast on that day. Bhootnath witnesses this and asks her why is she refusing her food? She replies, “to fulfil my wish, I don’t have any other means left”. Her religious nature is further established when, in order to cure her paralytic husband, she is willing to visit an ascetic who is deemed to have holy powers.

In the first meeting between Chhoti Bahu and Bhootnath, she makes it clear that she is lonely, in pain and seeks companionship. Bhootnath enquires about the reason behind the pain, to which she replies, “you men won’t understand this pain, only a woman whose fate is cursed, can do so”. Referring to the fact that her husband spends time with other women, she adds that it is a great ‘humiliation’ and ‘shame’ for womanhood itself. She also explains the reason behind calling Bhootnath to her chambers – it is the advertised magical properties of the vermillion she seeks. The fact that she is ready to believe the puffery in the vermillion advertisement speaks about her desperation to make her husband love her.

Chhoti Bahu is different from other women of the mansion. This is reflected in a conversation between her and the elder sister-in-law or the *Manjhli Didi*. The elder
sister-in-law criticises her for complaining about her husband’s absence. She says “my brother-in-law is a man, and until men of royal household do not spend their time with courtesans, they should not be considered men.” Chhoti Bahu’s reply is characteristic of her nature throughout the film. She says, “I come from a poor home…and all I know is that a woman’s life should be dedicated to her husband…what use are these jewels...this makeup…if the husband does not stay at home…what use do I have for this life itself.” The sister-in-law is aghast at her reply and says that she has besmirched the Choudhury clan’s name by being so possessive about her husband. The elder sister-in-law’s opinion about the role of wives in a feudal household depicts how the women in such families had completely accepted their subservient stature in the family, where men are free to indulge in philandering and alcohol and women are content with luxury and goods, without complaining about anything.

Chhoti Bahu narrates to Bhootnath that she has been conditioned since her childhood to revere and love her husband. She says that she is willing to give all her time and attention to her husband, but her primary complain is that her husband simply does not spend any time at the home. She further adds that while she is the daughter-in-law of a rich family and has access to all the wealth she needs, what she lacks is the company of her husband. In the ensuing scene and the song, we see Chhoti Bahu getting ready to meet her husband, preparing herself meticulously to greet him. The character of Chhoti Bahu has been infused with utmost devotion to her husband. Though Hindi cinema has generally portrayed wives as being subservient to the husband, her case seems to be an extreme example.

In one of the most important scenes of the film, Chhoti Bahu tries to stop her husband from going out. He responds that he is a man and not a key-ring that she can carry all the times. She pleads her to give her one chance to satisfy his needs. He mocks her and says that being a man from the Choudhary clan he won’t be satisfied by a simple woman from the household. Pressing her case, she says that she is willing to do whatever it takes to keep him from visiting other women. He replies that in order to keep him happy she needs to emulate the courtesans he is so fond of. She will need to sing and dance like them. To further dissuade her, he poses the most difficult demand for her – she has to become his drinking partner. The mere thought of a Hindu woman in an aristocratic family consuming liquor horrifies her. In a later
scene, she confronts her husband about his lack of interest in her. She asks “despite being a woman from a Hindu family, I have consumed alcohol…isn’t this the biggest sacrifice a woman could make?” While wives in Hindi cinema are expected to make sacrifices and be the ‘martyr’ wife so eulogized by Bollywood, Chhoti Bahu makes the ultimate sacrifice by agreeing to consume alcohol. Partaking in alcohol with her husband can be viewed as a transgression by Chhoti Bahu. While she is confined in the mansion all the times and is prohibited from leaving the premises, she is allowed to transgress only to please her husband.

*Sahib Bibi aur Gulam* depicts the Indian women cloistered in the confines of the Rajput family: the male exhibiting his manliness through arrogance, wine and women and the wife desperately attempting to lure her husband from the ‘kotha’, (brothel house) by breaking traditional confines of behavior. She resorts to drink in order to gain his love and companionship. (Jain, 2002, p. 251)

In a conversation that ensues after Chhoti Bahu asks Bhootnath to fetch alcohol for her, he pleads her not to drink as it would destroy her. She replies “it doesn’t matter if I get destroyed…a woman’s life is useless if she can’t satisfy the wishes of her husband.” Chhoti Bahu takes up the bottle and it seems to work, as her husband no longer goes outside, and even acknowledges that he is happy. In a scene between the husband and wife, he once again expresses his desire to go out. She pleads him not to go. The song that follows is counted as one of the most memorable songs of Bollywood. As Sen (2002) explains, “a desperate Chhoti Bahu falls at his feet, with the celebrated song *Na Jao Saiyan*. The words of the lyrics merge a woman’s power of seduction (desire) with a wife’s devotion (duty)*. Both the lyrics and the visuals epitomize the relationship between the feudal husband and the slave wife. In one shot, we see an indifferent husband attempting to leave, while the love-stricken wife again and again tries to stop him. In one shot, the wife falls unto the feet of her husband and sings “I submit myself at your feet, will live and die here”. Throughout the film, Chhoti Bahu remains in a constant state of deference to her husband. His company and love is all she seeks. In one scene, we do find her complaining, hinting at the possible impotency of the husband, in a confrontational tone she laments that she has not been blessed with a child yet. She only has the courage to ask this when she is drunk. While sober, she remains the coy and subservient wife that she is.
In *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam*, Chhoti Bahu’s character transforms. Explained by Sen (2002), “the transformation of *Choti Bahurani* is witnessed through the hypnotized eyes of Bhootnath who sees her change from a rejected, unfulfilled wife within the *haveli* – into a woman intoxicated with wine, passion and desire.” Chhoti Bahu has spent her entire life behind the huge walls of the mansion. The only time she dares to go out, she is killed. By stepping out of the mansion, she has clearly transgressed the boundaries and needs to be punished. That is the indication. In the last scene when Bhootnath discovers the skeleton of Chhoti Bahu, the visual of her skeleton is seen juxtaposed with her image. The voice over says “adorn me as much as you can…put vermillion on my forehead…so that people can say that *Sati Laxmi* has passed.” Chhoti Bahu makes a clear reference to *Sati*, the ancient Hindu practice of a widow immolating herself on the pyre of her husband. While Indian cinema was obsessed with the image of *Sati* in pre-independence era (films on *Sati* before independence include: *Sati Parvati, Sati Anjani, Sati Anasuya, Sati Padmni* etc.), with the gradual time change and evolved sensibilities of the audience, films extolling the virtues of being a *Sati* diminished. Chatterji (1998) writes about the relationship between the mythical Goddesses and Hindi cinema: “the mainstream film-maker has found it fruitful to use the different archetypes of mythical Goddesses to model many of their women characters on”. *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam* is as much about the criticism of a decadent feudal family as about the life of a woman (Chhoti Bahu) trapped in the family. While the film leaves no stones unturned to establish the cruel, degenerate and extravagant nature of the men of the family and is a scathing critique of the feudal lifestyle in colonial India, the film ultimately sacrifices Chhoti Bahu on the altars of a deeply patriarchal family.

The character of Chhoti Bahu has been constructed as a repository of womanhood as imagined in Indian culture. Her identity as a married woman has been highlighted through many ways – the multiple close-ups of marriage-related symbols, *bindi*, vermillion etc., the manner in which she addresses her husband, *swamy* (master), and in general her absolute acquiescence to her husband’s cruel demands, also her deep interest in various rites and rituals such as keeping fast for the husband’s wellbeing. The most important identity-marker is when she refers herself as *Sati*. Chhoti Bahu has not only been stereotyped as a mythical-religious symbol, her death has also been glorified. According to Kazmi (2010), Chhoti Bahu has donned the
mantle of *pativrata nari* and “this is her chief defining characteristic, her badge which she displays proudly, even tragically, till her bitter end.”

### 4.2.2 *Guide* (1965), directed by Vijay Anand

Directed by Vijay Anand and featuring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rahman, *Guide* is a romantic drama adapted from a novel of the same name. The novel, *Guide* (1958), written by R.K. Narayan is the inspiration behind the film. Although the film is an adaptation of the novel, it digresses on several plot lines. The novel was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy award in 1960. The movie was shot both in English and Hindi, with an American, Tad Danielewski, directing the English version. While the Hindi version was a hit and considered as one of the finest films of both the lead actors, the English version was only released in 2007 at the Cannes Film Festival, forty-two years after it was first made (Roy, 2013).

The film narrates the story of a charming guide called Raju (Dev Anand), a well-known figure in the picturesque town of Udaipur. Raju is well versed in several languages and is popular amongst tourists who are impressed by his gregarious nature. His simple life takes a dramatic turn when he meets Rosie (Waheeda Rahman) who has come to the town along with her archaeologist husband Marco (Kishore Sahu). Right from the beginning, the film establishes that Marco does not care about his wife and is of cruel nature. His only interest in the town is of professional nature as he is interested in working at the archaeological sites in the city. The film provides a background story of the beautiful Rosie. She was born into a *devadasi* family and for her, the only way out of the profession was to marry somebody of repute. Her mother fixes her marriage with Marco who is besotted with her beauty and instantly agrees to marry her. Rosie soon realizes that whatever dreams she had of marriage are shattered, as Marco is not only of extremely unpleasant nature, but in a subtle manner the film also hints at his impotency. Moreover, Rosie has one passion in life – dancing. Marco is vehemently opposed to her taking any interest in dancing as he considers it to be an inferior art practiced by *devadasis*. In one of the first meetings between Rosie and Raju, she asks him to take her to any place where snake-charmers reside, as she is interested in dancing along with them. In order to discover the caves at the archaeological site, Marco starts to live outside the city, leaving Rosie alone. Spurned by her husband, Rosie attempts suicide, however she is saved. The incident
brings Raju and Rosie together and he makes her realize that she does not have to suffer just because she is a woman. Raju also makes her understand the importance of dancing as an art. Invigorated by Raju’s passionate appeal to stand on her own feet, Rosie confronts Marco at the caves. Rosie and Marco’s verbal confrontation is the final breaking point between the husband and the wife. Raju takes Rosie to his home. Though she has escaped her marriage to find love and identity, she only finds hostility and contempt at his home. Raju and Rosie’s relationship changes to that of lovers and they leave town. Rosie slowly becomes known in the show business and becomes a renowned dancer. Success and money is no longer a problem and the couple have a prosperous and social life. Meanwhile, Raju is not able to adjust to newly found money and takes to gambling and drinking. Rosie is not happy with Raju’s lifestyle and openly explains this to him. Their relationship turns frosty. Raju becomes insecure and in a moment of insecurity forges a cheque in order to stop Marco from sending Rosie some jewellery. Raju’s forgery is caught and he is sentenced to two years of prison. He finishes his sentence and unable to face the humiliation of being branded a thief he leaves the town and lands in a distant village. The simple villagers mistake him for a holy man and beseech him for all sort of problems. Raju’s reputation as a man with divine powers grows and he is revered by the villagers. The village is soon hit by a severe draught and everybody is distressed. They seek Raju’s help and request him to fast in order to beseech the gods. Initially, Raju refuses and explains that he is not a holy man, but the villagers are not convinced. Raju realizes that he is their only hope and agrees to fast. His health deteriorates and in the final scene of the movie, we see Raju surrounded by Rosie and his mother. The heavens pour, and it rains heavily. Everybody is happy. Rosie rushes to inform Raju of the rains, only to find him dead.

The film primarily defines Rosie’s role as that of a wife. However, unlike the wives of Hindi cinema, she does not possess a single characteristic of an ‘ideal’ wife as defined by the society. Right from the moment she arrives in Udaipur, the town where the story is based, it is easily observable that she is not willing to be silent and live according to his husband’s whims and fancies. In one of the first scenes involving Marco, Raju and Rosie, Marco makes it clear that he has no ambitions of touring the city and his only wish is to visit the caves. Rosie immediately reminds him that she would like to explore the city. The first thing that Rosie asks Raju is the location of
the snake-charmers locality as she intends to dance with them. It is important to note that Rosie is passionate about dancing and her husband has strictly prohibited her to practice. The dance is one of the most important scenes in the film, as Rosie, while dancing, appears in an unbridled manner – the passionate and non-sexualized dance is her way of expressing her latent desires. Although she asks Raju not to inform Marco about this, the dance also symbolizes her rebellion from the martinet and loveless husband. It also establishes Rosie’s character in the film from the beginning that she is unlike the orthodox and servile wives who so often appear in Hindi films.

Rosie’s character has been sketched as the one who takes a stand against oppressive and selfish men. The only time she tries to convince Marco of her love is when she tries to commit suicide. The suicide attempt is Rosie’s way of attracting her husband’s attention. From the beginning of the film, it is clear that Rosie and Marco’s is a loveless marriage. The suicide attempt is the last-ditch effort by Rosie to salvage her marriage, perhaps she thinks that her suffering would bring back her husband. The suicide attempt has another important role in the film. It brings Rosie and Raju together. After Rosie is recuperating from the suicide attempt, during a candid conversation with Raju, she enquires whether he is married. Raju replies in negative, and says in a jesting tone that he will be a tough husband who believes in a wife that cooks and cares for him thoroughly. She further asks whether he will also love his wife. Raju says that he will love her for sure. Rosie immediately says that if you will love your wife, she will not have any problem in doing all those things and her life would be a success.

Marco’s cruel nature is further established when he confronts Rosie about the suicide attempt. Instead of showing any sympathy or enquiring about her health, he accuses Rosie of deliberately creating mischief and troubling him. He reminds her that she has all the wealth, prosperity and comforts but is still not happy with him. An emotionally weakened Rosie again tries to commit suicide only to be stopped by Raju who reminds her that cursing the fate and ending one’s life is not an option. Raju’s encouragement brings new life in Rosie. She is now seen walking with musical anklets in the open market with glee and total abandonment. Her carefree walk in the market, and the song that ensues symbolise her breaking of the shackles the loveless marriage had imposed on herself. The musical anklets are traditionally associated with courtesans, and in many Hindi films (Pakeezah, Umrao Jaan etc.) heroines wore them.
to establish the character of courtesans. While courtesans wear the anklets in the confines of the brothels, Rosie does so in the open. It is established early in the movie that she comes from a devdasi (religious prostitutes) family. The profession of devdasis, just like that of the courtesans, attracts only disdain from the common people, but Rosie in a moment of emancipation embraces her past life. She is no longer ashamed of her past. This scene of her wearing anklets also symbolises her latent rebellion to her husband, who has ridiculed her past life and who only has hatred for the profession. The two suicide attempts are the only week points in her caricature in the film, but then they bring her closer to Raju.

In a scene where Rosie discloses her past identity to Raju, she says that she is thankful to Marco for accepting her and providing her with a home and an identity. Raju reminds her that times have changed and a woman is no longer considered the slave of the house. Further, he adds “gone are the days when a woman has to silently suffer…nobody should be considered inferior because of her caste or profession.” It is important to note that it is Raju who encourages Rosie to embrace her passion. He emboldens Rosie to consider dance as an art form. Encouraged by Raju, Rosie goes to meet Marco to convince him about her passion, only to find him drunk and in the company of two women. While the film regularly establishes Marco as a cruel husband, the directors also made it sure to portray him as a debauched one. Thus, Rosie’s actions are a consequence of Marco’s womanizing and drinking. It is pertinent to note that, Guide, the 1958 novel, does not include this scene. The creation of a really bad Marco was solely aimed for the film audience, keeping in mind the sensibility of the audience, who would not have accepted a married woman leaving her husband, unless the husband has been caricatured in extremely bad light.

Rosie asserts her identity time and again in the film. One of the most important scenes is when she confronts Marco while visiting him in the caves, all bedecked in a traditional dancer’s dress. Marco reminds her that he has already taken a decision about her dancing career and it is a no. Rosie, defying the traditional wives of Hindi cinema, retorts “It is not necessary Marco that I agree to all of your decisions.” Marco associates her dancing interest with that of her past, her being born in a devdasi family. He says that she is better off with the dignity of his name rather than the profession of her mother. Rosie replies that she prefers her mother’s profession to the ‘dignity’ he gave her. In the climax of the scene, we see Rosie
yelling at the top of her voice, “Marco, I want to live”. It is the sheer despair of Rosie that results in such an exhilaration. It is this dialogue that epitomizes Rosie’s character in the film. Rosie further antagonizes Marco by claiming that he does not need a wife, but a woman who would satisfy his carnal desires. Undoubtedly, Rosie was one of the most powerful female voices in Hindi cinema till the 1960s. Here was a woman who was not willing to be a martyr or conform to the standards set up by the society. She is vocal about her desires and is not willing to be stuck in a marriage devoid of love and sex. “Filmmaker Vijay Anand appears fascinated with Rosie in Guide for daring to defy her impotent husband with ‘Marco Main Jeena Chahti Hoon’” (Somaaya, 2004). Rosie was not only defying her husband but also defying a culture and tradition that puts great premium on the inviolability of marriages. Writing about the divorce rates in the 1960s, Ravindra (2013) says that “it is difficult to find current statistics on divorce in India. Recent news stories and internet stories provide some data. One survey suggests that in the 1960s, there were one to two divorces per year in Delhi.” While Rosie does not officially divorce Marco, her leaving the marriage is of more blasphemous nature. It is a tribute to the actress and the director of the movie that they were able to create a narration of a woman that was not only accepted by the audience but was also more realistic than the portrayal of woman in general and wives in particular. In an interview conducted with the columnist Mukul Kesavan (cited in Sinha, 2012), Waheeda Rahman says that she was warned of ‘career suicide’ by friends and well-wishers, who were concerned that playing Rosie, a woman who leaves her husband for her lover, would damage her career. She adds: “the heroine leaves her husband and goes for a live-in relationship with her boyfriend, an unthinkable thing in those days. I got telegrams from filmmakers after the release of the film saying excellent performance but for a negative role.” That the role was interpreted as negative by the filmmakers suggests that the prevalent attitude amongst filmmakers was to cast wives in set patterns, rather than in any other role that defied the norms or the prevalent attitudes at that time.

While the wives in Hindi cinema are traditionally attired and always sport the traditional markers of marriage such as vermillion and a covered head, Rosie in Guide is also different in this aspect. We do not see her with vermillion or any other mannerisms associated with a coy wife. Her name itself is different. “Right from the beginning the central female character in Guide played by Waheeda Rahman, is
shown to be moving in rather unorthodox circumstances. She is Rosie (Waheeda Rahman), therefore not a ‘pious Hindu girl’” (Somaaya et al., 2012).

Though Rosie is shown hungry for love and acceptance, after she becomes a star and gets the love of her life (Raju), we see her character evolve. It is Raju’s love for money and gambling that makes her change. Raju is overwhelmed with the money that comes with Rosie’s success, and takes to a luxurious lifestyle. Rosie is certainly not happy with this and she expresses her concern about his lifestyle. The relationship between the couple turns frosty and it is Raju not Rosie who wants to make amends. While the females are seen usually dependent on males in society and in cinema, in Guide we see a reversal of roles. Even the depiction of the romantic relationship between Raju and Rosie is different from the usual Hindi films. Rosie does not succumb to Raju’s emotional overtures and even refuses sex on several occasions. Rosie is not a desire-less, voice-less creature Bollywood is so fond of. She is a human being and a woman with all the emotional details and flaws. Notably, her character evolves from that of a woman who wants acceptance due to her past to a woman who will voice her opinion and desires. When she was stuck in a loveless marriage with Marco, we see her rebelling from the marriage. When the marriage breaks, we do not see her crying or be in a state of emotional trauma. Instead, she seamlessly leaves the marriage to live with another man.

When the relationship with Raju turns sour, we do not see her pleading with him to change. Instead, she accuses him of loving her for a particular motive, namely money. While Raju makes it clear that it is he who has shown her the path to stardom and success, Rosie does not flinch. Her character possesses a “distinct melancholy, a latent sadness in her being and that prevails throughout the film” (Somaaya et al., 2012).

While Rosie’s character has been sketched with details, the film is ultimately about Raju the guide, after all the film carries the name of the protagonist. When Raju goes to the jail for forgery, he comes to meet Rosie for the last time. However, she is not in a mood to forgive, and ignores him. Raju has been made to pay for a crime he committed. The reason behind Rosie’s cold behaviour has also been made clear. Still, in a song in the movie, he brandishes her with the tag of ‘unfaithful’. The song ‘Kya se kya ho gaya, bewafa tere pyar main’ (Look what happened to me, O unfaithful) is
picturized after Rosie refuses to meet him, before he departs for the jail. The visuals in the song are also relevant. In one frame, we see a pair of handcuffed hands (Raju’s) and Rosie’s dancing image in between the hands. The message is clear and loud – whatever has befallen Raju is of Rosie’s doing.

In one of the final scenes between Raju and Rosie, we finally see a repentant Rosie, who says that she now has realized his importance, and should have lied to save him from the jail. The scene is balanced with Raju’s confession too, who accepts that he could not manage all the money and the lifestyle, and is in jail because of his actions. The film takes a dramatic turn in the end, and continues with where it started, that is Raju’s role as a holy man in the village. Raju dies in the end due to the stubborn villagers who want him to fast for the rains. While Raju dies for the villagers and the rains, he becomes a martyr-like figure in the film.

4.3 Analysis of selected films from 1970 to 1980

The 1971 Indo-Pak war augured a difficult start for the decade. While the war was favourable in its outcome for India, the ensuing years were not. The decade has been marred forever due to the implementation of Emergency from 1975 to 1977. Other social and political upheavals also mark this time period as important in India’s history. As Somaaya et al. (2012) writes about 1970s, “the country entered a period of upheaval both politically and socially, as people’s simmering anger expressed itself in the form of micro-level grassroots movements that fought the establishment across the country.” The student’s agitation in Gujarat and the nationwide call for ‘total revolution’ against Indira Gandhi by J.P Narayan and the Naxalite movement in West Bengal and adjoining areas are historical events associated with the 1970s.

It was during the 1970s that parallel cinema in India entered into limelight. Not only Hindi parallel films, but parallel films and directors from regional languages such as Malayalam made their mark during this time. Shyam Benegal, one of the doyens of the Indian Parallel cinema made some of his important films [Ankur (1974), Nishant (1975), Manthan (1976) etc.] during this time. In The 1970s and its Legacies in India's Cinemas, Joshi and Dudrah (2014) write that “the legacies of the 1970s on cinema remain palpable today. The parallel cinema, documentary, Indie filmmaking and film industries outside Bombay thrive because of talent and institutional initiatives originating in the 1970s.”
The 1970s was also the era of Amitabh Bachchan. The decade witnessed some of his most renowned films getting released, such as Anand (1971), Zanjeer (1973), Sholay (1975) and Deewar (1975). The films earnestly established him as a film star loved and adored by the Indian masses. According to Anjaria (2012), Hindi cinema in this decade went through an inalterable change. “Central to this narrative is the figure of the ‘angry young man ‘who represented the deep social angst of the time, and constituted a major shift away from the romantic heroes of the decade before”. While the image of the angry young man was personified by the actor Amitabh Bachchan, it was also depicted by other actors of the time.

While the mainstream cinema continued to be obsessed with romance and multi-starrer films, the mantle of criticizing the establishment and satirizing the social and political wrongs of the country fell on the ideology-based art house films. Many of the art house films were financed by the state itself. In certain cases, the establishment hit back. For instance, Amrit Nahata’s 1973 film Kissa Kursi Ka was banned by the government and its prints were confiscated. The film was a satire on the politics of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi.

Two of the biggest blockbusters of the era that deserve mention are Sholay (1975) and Jai Santoshi Maa (1975). While Sholay epitomized the Bollywood genre known as the ‘masala film’, Jai Santoshi Maa’s success somewhat surprised the critics and film analysts. Sholay was a heavily promoted multi-starrer film and picked up inspiration from several western genre films [The Good, The Bad and the Ugly (1966), The Magnificent Seven (1960), Once Upon A Time in The West (1968), For A Few Dollars More (1965)]. The film attained the status of what is often described as a ‘cult’ film. The dialogues and characters in Sholay are one of the most identified motifs in Hindi cinema. Jai Santoshi Maa, on the other hand was a low-budget film with unknown actors. The religious theme of the film so impressed the audience, particularly the rural audience and women audience, that “audiences were showering coins, flower petals and rice at the screen in appreciation of the film. They entered the cinema barefoot and set up a small temple outside…in Bandra, where mythological films aren’t shown” (Kabir, 2001; cited in Lutgendorf, 2002).
4.3.1 *Abhimaan* (Pride, 1973) Directed by Hrishikesh Mukherjee

*Abhimaan* is mostly remembered for its songs, sung by musical icons such as Mohammad Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar and Kishore Kumar. The lyrics were penned by the avant-garde Urdu poet Majrooh Sultanpuri. The film brought a Filmfare Award for the best actress to Jaya Bachchan in 1973.

*Abhimaan* is the story of a famous and talented singer Subir Kumar (Amitabh Bachchan) and his tumultuous relationship with his wife, Uma (Jaya Bachchan), also a singer. The film opens with a confident Subir singing on a stage, lamenting about not finding a desired partner in life, despite all the wealth and fame. The film reveals Subir’s stardom, and it is established that he is well-liked by the audience and is a singing sensation. Money is not a problem for the young and good-looking singer who is hounded by the press and girls alike. Subir lives with Chandru (Asrani) who is not only his friend and confidante but also manages his business efficiently. On a visit to an aunt (Durga Khote), who lives in an idyllic and scenic village, Subir is mesmerized by a melodious voice. The voice belongs to Uma, the daughter of a village elder, Sadanand (A.K. Hangal), who is also an expert in classical music. The young couple meet, and in the beautiful surroundings of the village, fall in love. After a brief courtship, they are married, and the new bride comes to the city with her husband. During a party hosted in lieu of the marriage, Uma and Subir sing a melodious song. Uma’s talent for singing is recognized by everybody and soon the husband--wife pair become famous as duet singers. Uma, however, is a better singer and her talent is recognized by the film industry. A producer approaches Subir and Chandru for Uma as a playback singer in an upcoming movie. Both Subir and Chandru are a little taken aback by the producer’s request. Uma is a bit hesitant in singing solo. Subir, however, convinces her to sing for the movie. The ensuing song is used as a montage for the change in Subir’s character and the rise in Uma’s career as a singer. In between visuals of Uma singing and receiving awards, we see a visibly distressed Subir, who is clearly not happy with his wife’s success. During a scene juxtaposed in the song, we see Subir and Uma entering a theatre. A photographer asks Subir to step aside, as he focusses on Uma alone. As Uma’s career graph soars and her popularity increases, Subir becomes more and more despondent. He is uncomfortable with his wife’s success and his ego is bruised. Unable to express himself, he starts to misbehave with her. Uma accepts her husband’s cold behaviour and is ready to leave singing.
Unable to accept his wife’s success, Subir readily takes up alcohol. He is so exasperated with the situation that he starts to view his wife as his competition. He deliberately quotes a higher fee to a producer so as to check whether he is a better singer than her. When Chandru tries to put some sense in Subir, he argues with him and verbally confronts him. Subir’s downfall is peaked when he takes up residence at his female friend, Chitra’s (Bindu) place.

Subir seems unmoved by his wife’s continuous love and exhortation that she cares about him. Their relationship hits rock bottom when a hurt Uma leaves for her home. The film takes a dramatic turn when Subir is informed by Chandru that Uma is pregnant. Subir, continuing with his stubborn attitude, refuses to visit his wife. He decides not to be present at his wife’s delivery. His wife, however, suffers from miscarriage and completely breaks down with grief. Subir’s aunt severely reprimands him for his stubborn behaviour and convinces him to visit Uma’s home. Subir finally meets his wife and apologizes to her for his behaviour. After the brief apology, the film abruptly cuts to a psychiatrist’s office. As a solution to Uma’s problem, the doctor suggests that she needs to reconnect with the past. At this stage, Brajeshwar Rai (David Abraham Cheulkar), an accomplished musician/singer and a mentor-like figure to Subir, steps in and offers a somewhat impractical solution. According to him, Subir needs to sing again, since music brought Subir and Uma together it will also heal their relationship.

In the end of the movie, we see Subir returning to the stage and singing a romantic and somewhat gloomy song. Uma breaks down upon hearing her husband and the song is interrupted. Brajeshwar Rai calls Uma on the stage and asks her to sing along with her husband. She starts to sing and everybody can be seen with tears in their eyes. The film ends with Subir leaving the theatre along with his wife, while an enthusiastic audience indulged in applause.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee, the director of the film, has been credited with belonging to middle-of-the-road cinema. His novelty, along with directors such as Basu Chatterjee, Gulzar, Rajendra Singh Bedi, lays in having “a sophistication that was in keeping with the recent development” (Sengupta, 2003; cited in Poduval, n.d.). According to Gulzar et al. (2003), this new trend of cinema in the 1970s was a balance between the commercial requirements of the industry and the aesthetic
requirements of the art house cinema. It was pioneered by Hrishikesh Mukherjee who “carved a middle path between the extravagance of mainstream cinema and the stark realism of art cinema”.

Poduval’s (n.d.) exposition of Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Amitabh Bachchan’s cinematic partnership fits aptly in Abhimaan: “Hrishikesh Mukherjee’s films of the 1970s with Amitabh Bachchan in key early roles are melodramas of personal tension between intimate individuals, ending in an awkwardly-staged reconciliation that also involves the chastening of the socially-privileged, haughty male protagonist.” The film is essentially about a wife whose rising career eclipses that of her husband’s and the unexplained and awkward reconciliation that follows. While the film is considered a musical success, with many hit and famous songs sung by musical legends, the film’s musical prowess hides the real issue being addressed, that is the place of a working wife in a society. According to Poduval (n.d.), Abhimaan offers “a perspective on the re-making of the Indian middle-class during the 1970s…it is the questioning of gender norms that seems to be the more emphatic point in the film.” The film primarily categorizes Uma in the role of a wife. Since she is also a singer, she could have been categorized as a professional woman. Uma in Abhimaan has been cast as a wife, as per the desire of Bollywood. She is dressed in Saris throughout the film. There are multiple shots of her covering her head with the pallu (edge of the sari, used to cover the head). Before her marriage, we see her dressed in simple white colour. Post marriage, she sports bright colours, traditionally associated with brides. Bindi and vermillion, the traditional markers of a married woman in the Indian society and in Hindi cinema, can be seen in many shots too. Another character attribute of Uma is her religious nature. The film reveals the character of Uma with a song while she performs a morning prayer. Her subservience to Subir, her husband, is absolute. When he starts to misbehave with her, she does not complain. It is her non-complaining nature and the willingness to accept her husband’s haughty nature that defines her character in the film. She is willing to give up her career, so that her husband returns to being ‘normal’. It is pertinent to note that Abhimaan was made at a time “when ‘the woman question’ was returning to the national agenda under feminist pressure” (Poduval, 2012).

The film begins with the idea that the wife is more talented than the husband, rather than accommodating the two characters in some sort of logical reconciliation,
or the husband accepting the truth as it is. Subir simply offers an apology and the story moves on to project Uma as a distressed mother who has lost her child during the birth. What perhaps could be the most important scene in the film transforms into a token of chastisement. In the scene when Subir finally meets Uma, he simply asks “you are upset with me…please forgive me.” These words were meant to justify his continuous mistreatment of his wife and resentment stemming from his bruised ego. According to Tere (2012)

Abhimaan (1973) begins with premise of the wife (Jaya Bachchan) being more talented than the husband (Amitabh Bachchan). This in itself is a defiance of the stereotype. However, the film crumbles from then on when the wife gives up her thriving musical career for satisfying the husband’s ego culminating to a conventional closure that demands adherence to traditional values of marriage and motherhood. (p. 3)

The lead actor in Abhimaan, Amitabh Bachchan, has long been associated with the ‘angry young man’ persona. According to Poduval (n.d), the ‘brooding anger’ that stems from this persona can also be seen working in Abhimaan. Rather that directed against the system in the form of populist anger, it has been directed against a loved one. This resentment has been “directed against the rise/popularity of the lower middle-class wife (in Abhimaan).” No explanations have been given to explain the change in Subir’s characters, a loving and affable man suddenly transforming into a sulking person filled with anger and contempt. A possible explanation comes from a character, Brajeshwar Rai, the senior music maestro, who is projected as a mentor-like figure to Subir. In the scene, where Subir informs him that he will take Uma as his singing partner, Brajeshwar Rai says to another person “I hope Subir doesn’t makes the mistake of taking Uma as his partner…Uma is more talented than Subir…and history has taught us that man is superior to woman…and if a wife surpasses her husband in talent/expertise, will the man accept it?” Interestingly, it is the old music maestro that offers the solution to the woes of Subir and Uma. He says to Subir, “Uma and you share one quality…that is music. It was music that brought you and her together…so the solution to your problem lies in music itself.” Here, Brajeshwar Rai is exhorting Subir to sing once again on stage, as it will ‘cure’ Uma of the depression. Subir indeed sings once again on the stage and is joined by a teary-
eyed Uma, who sings and yearns for a child that will come in the future. In the end, Uma’s defining characteristic according to the film is motherhood. Her rising career, her talent as a singer and the husband’s bruised ego have all been relegated into the background.

4.3.2 Julie (1975), directed by K. S. Sethumadhavan

Primarily a Malyalam film director, K. S. Sethumadhavan tried his hand in directing films in Oriya, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Hindi. Julie was a remake of 1974 Malyalam film Chattakari, directed by Sethumadhavan himself. Both the films have the same actress Laxmi, in the lead role. Both the films were box office hits and are known for the actress Laxmi’s acting talent. Julie, the Hindi film, was also a musical hit, with prominent songs sung by Kishore Kumar.

Set in an unnamed sleepy town, Julie depicts the story of a lower middle class Anglo-Indian family. Head of the family, the only earning member, Mr. Morris (Om Prakash) works in the railways and is an engine driver. The lady of the house, Margaret (Nadira) presides over four children, of whom Julie (Laxmi Narayan) is a young and vivacious girl and is the apple of the eye of the family. Margaret is forever pining for England, which she considers as her home. She laments about the past time and is always planning to leave India. Morris has a serious alcohol problem and is rarely seen sober on the screen. The Christian identity of the family is established from the outset. In the very first scene, a perceived reference to the dietary habits of the Christians is made. The camera regularly shows a big picture of Jesus Christ adorning the wall of the Morris.

Julie is a college going girl who adores her father. The father--daughter camaraderie is established from the beginning of the film and we see several scenes repeating the father--daughter love. Julie is friends with a Hindu girl, Usha Bhattacharya (Rita Bhaduri), whose father Mr. Bhattacharya also works in the railways. Though he is much senior to the locomotive-driver Morris, he is a friend to the family and adores Julie. The Bhattacharya’s are an upper class Hindu family and everybody in the family is relaxed about caste rules and orthodox traditions, except Usha’s mother (Achala Sachdeva). Mrs. Devki Bhattacharya is a stickler about Hindu traditions and rules and considers the presence of Julie, a Christian in her home, as being impure. Julie is in a friendly relationship with a town boy called Richard (Jalal
Agha). While Richard is clearly in love with Julie, she makes it clear that theirs is a relationship based on friendship and not love.

During a friendly visit to Usha’s home, Julie meets Shashi (Vikram Makandar), the only son of the Bhattacharya family. The young couple exchange glances and it is made clear that they have developed a liking for each other. The couple meet at Julie’s subsequent visits and slowly they fall in love. Julie’s mother is unhappy about her daughter’s interest in a Hindu boy. She expresses her displeasure and hints at Richard being a more suitable boy. Julie is unflinched at her mother’s disapproval and continues to meet Shashi. Their blossoming romance is picturized in a song and their relationship is cemented as lovers. Shashi leaves for another town and the story concentrates on the financial trials and tribulations of the family. The eldest son of Morris household returns after finding a job in England. The prospects of going to England makes Margaret happy. Morris however is not excited about leaving India and reiterates his love for the country, saying that he was born in India and will die here.

Shashi returns from his out of town visit and the lovers unite. His family is out of town and the couple see this as an opportunity to indulge in sexual escapades. While Julie is a bit hesitant to engage in any sexual activity, Shashi convinces her about his love for her. Once again, a song intervenes to depict in the usual Bollywood manner the sexual activity between a couple. Shashi leaves the town once again. To her absolute horror, Julie discovers that she is pregnant. The discovery is more painful for her as there is nobody to console or help her. In desperation she confesses to her mother, who upon hearing that her unwed daughter is pregnant is horrified, and in anger physically assaults her. In order to escape the humiliation, Margaret takes Julie to a relative, an aunt who lives in a different city. Before Julie departs, she meets Usha and informs her about the pregnancy. Julie, inexplicably, asks her not to inform Shashi of her ordeal. Margaret initially plans to convince Julie for an abortion, she wants the aunt to help her in the plan. However, the aunt reminds her that it is a sin to terminate a life like that and being a Christian she should not think of doing anything like that. Margaret finally decides to leave Julie at the aunt’s place. Julie will remain for the rest of her pregnancy and will give birth at the aunt’s place only. An already broken Julie is further saddened when she hears about this. The idea of living
separately from her family at an alien place, that too, when she is pregnant is enough to make her sob uncontrollably.

Meanwhile, alcohol takes its toll on Morris’s health. He passes away after falling ill. Julie, of course, is not present during her father’s death and is informed by the aunt. The shock of the death sends Julie into labour and a child is born. Margaret arrives at the aunt’s place to finally take Julie back to home. She, however, has one condition, that Julie must leave her child at an orphanage. Julie once again is inconsolable and is forced to leave the child behind. A despondent Julie returns to her home town and has an unsuccessful attempt for a job, after the manager tries to molest her. It is as this time that Shashi, who was inexplicably absent throughout Julie’s ordeal, finally comes out of nowhere and meets her. Upon hearing Julie’s story, he tells her that he loves her dearly and would convince his parents to allow him to marry her. Shashi’s mother initially appears to be conducive to the idea but soon it becomes clear that her warm meeting with Julie was only a facade and she is against the wedding. Margaret, meanwhile has packed her bags to leave for England along with Julie and the rest of the children. It is at this time that Usha informs her parents that it is Shashi who is responsible for Julie’s pregnancy. Mr. Bhattacharya has devised a plan to make everybody present at his home. When everybody is there, including Margaret, Usha enters with the child. Mr. Bhattacharya delivers a monologue on how all the identities are created by man, and human beings, whether Indians or Anglo-Indians are all the same. He not only convinces his wife, but also Margaret, both of whom were against the proposed marriage of Julie and Shashi. The film ends with a repentant Margaret embracing the child.

Presumably, Julie is about the restrictive social notions about inter-religious marriage and unwed motherhood. The film, however, ultimately transforms into stereotyping an Anglo-Indian Christian family and unnecessary sexualizing of the female lead, Julie. While, marriage and motherhood hold sacrosanct positions in the Indian society and Hindi cinema, portrayal of unwed mothers is not a thoroughly explored phenomenon in Hindi cinema and leaves much to be desired. There are certain notable examples when Hindi cinema experimented with the taboo topic, namely Dhool Ka Phool (1959), Aradhana (1969), Julie (1975), Trishul (1978), Shakti (1982), Kya Kehna (2000) and Paa (2009). Summarizing the portrayal of unwed mother, Chatterji (2015) writes,
the unwed mother on celluloid has slowly but surely been liberating herself from social ostracisms by refusing to be bugged down by social and moral value judgements made on her position. In Dhool Ka Phool, Aradhana and Julie, the unwed mother was portrayed as victim. Gradually, films featuring the unwed mother began to evolve trying to spell out that unwed motherhood was not really a social stigma as it was made out to be.

It is the opening credits of Julie that set the tone of the entire film. The film credits are displayed along with images of Julie in various moods and expressions. It is the close-up of her face and sensuous expressions that stand out. Usually, film credits in 1970s were devoid of visuals and displayed text only, that the director thought it important to display the female protagonist in such a manner speaks about the general portrayal of Julie in the film. Following the credits, in the first visual of the film, we see a young and beautiful woman dressed in a short white skirt, sashaying carelessly on a bridge. While walking on the bridge, she touches her hair in an aimless manner. The latent sexuality in the establishment of the lead character cannot be missed. It becomes more apparent when it is revealed that Julie is there to deliver food to her father at the railyard. The innocuous reason behind her appearance on the screen and the manner in which she is picturized are diametrically opposite. The next scene continues with the establishment of Julie’s character as that of a sexually desirable woman. Julie visits a shop whose owner not only tries to touch her inappropriately but also makes sly underhand phallic references. The owner is unfazed at Julie’s protest and continues with his advances and is only stopped when she leaves the store in anger. The shop owner’s character appears three more times on the screen and is wholly irrelevant to the story. Though it could be argued that the character of the shop owner, Rahim (Rajendra Nath), was created to add a touch of humour to the story, two of the four times he appears on the screen, he does so by making sexual advances towards Julie.

The filmmaker in order to further establish the character of Julie introduces Richard, her friend, in the beginning of the film. Julie can be seen as hitching a ride on Richard’s bicycle. Richard is seen taking benefit of his proximity to Julie, and though it is not visible on screen, the audience can deduce that he is touching Julie in a sexually playful manner. At this time, it is not clear whether the two of them are in a
romantic relationship. Later in the film, it becomes clear that Julie considers Richard as her friend only. And it was Richard who had romantic and sexual expectations from Julie.

During a party at Julie’s home, she is introduced to a family friend. The moment the family friend sees Julie, we see Laura Mulvey’s concept of male gaze working in full force. When Julie’s mother introduces her to the family friend, Mr. Mishra, we see him slowly move his gaze from her face to her legs. The camera immediately takes over and a slow pan from Julie’s legs, exposed due to the short skirt, to her face is made. We also see lecherous expression on the family friend’s face. This could be a cue for his character since he would later in the film try to get sexual favours from Julie in exchange of a job. The camera’s gaze that reveals Julie from her legs to her face is observed one more time in the film. In the scene where Julie meets Shashi, her romantic partner, once again the camera intently focuses on her bare legs and moves upwards to reveal Julie. Immediately after the shot, a very impressed Shashi can be observed. While Shashi appears confident and is a little brash in his dialogues, Julie appears to be coy and shy.

The sexual intercourse between Julie and Shashi “is a pure carnal act of lust between two individuals” (Kazmi, 2010). Julie was reluctant to indulge in any sexual activity. It was Shashi who convinces her to be his sexual partner. He does so by subtly blackmailing her by toying with her emotions. After Julie refuses in a coy manner his sexual advances, a visibly dejected Shashi says that “when I will return next time, you will find a new boyfriend”. This propels Julie to affirm her love for him. It is at his juncture that she promises to come next day in order to fulfil the sexual promise. In the scene, preceding the song that picturizes their sexual encounter, we once again see Shashi forcing his will in a subtle manner. He asks her to consume alcohol. She refuses and says “this is poison.” Shashi immediately replies “those who love…take poison wilfully.” The love-making scene between Julie and Shashi is picturized in the form of a song. Although the song is usual in terms of a typical Bollywood love song, in order to affirm the sexual nature of the song, the visuals show nude pictures in a magazine lying on the bed. Perhaps this is as far as the censor boards would allow to depict a scene involving sexual intimacy.
Another important aspect of the film is that the story is based on an Anglo-Indian family. This community has been thoroughly underrepresented in Hindi cinema. What then was the reason behind setting the story in a Christian Anglo-Indian family? Ghose (2006) explains:

Julie (1975) revolved around the theme of pre-marital sex. Julie, the protagonist, as the name suggests was not Hindu. She was an Anglo Indian and lived with her family in Goa. The fact that this story had to be centered on an Anglo Indian girl when that segment of society was highly underrepresented in Hindi cinema is worth noting. The story of a Hindu girl caught in a situation like this would not have gone down too well with the pre dominantly Hindu audience. And ‘Julie’ was a decidedly not a Hindu name. (p. 7)

The film is unrivalled when it comes to stereotyping Anglo-Indians. Julie’s father is a locomotive driver. While the community has long been associated with the railways and has made meaningful contributions to the Indian railways, Anglo-Indians certainly were not confined to one profession only. The Christian identity of the family was amplified in various ways. Almost all the Anglo-Indian characters in Julie evoke Jesus Christ at some time or the other. They sport a pendant bearing the image of the cross. The Morris household prominently displays an image of the Christ. The stereotyping also includes food. In the very first scene, when Julie takes food to his father, an excited Morris mentions pork. The most disparaging commentary on the perceived Christian lifestyle comes from Julie herself. During a conversation between Mr. Bhattacharya and Julie, she mentions the fragrance of the incense sticks being burned in his home. She says “in our home we do not have any aroma but an odour all the time.” When Mr. Bhattacharya inquires about the source of this odour, she adds “it comes from rotting alcohol, cigarettes, fish and meat”. Writing about the portrayal of Anglo-Indians in Hollywood and Bollywood films, D’Cruz (2007) castigates Julie and writes that the director “Sethumadhaven’s treatment of Anglo-Indian life in post-independence India is, in turn, grotesque, comic and oddly sympathetic towards its ‘mixed-race’ characters.” Further, D’ Cruz adds:

In the digenic world of Julie, Anglo-Indians represent modernity and sexuality. Far from being the dispossessed ‘poor relations’ of
the British Raj, Anglo-Indians represent a lust for life, western life. From their clothes to their social customs, the film imbues Julie’s family with an energy that is progressive in its potential to refashion a secular, modern Indian cultural identity. Anglo-Indians are “‘good-time’ people, always up for a drink, smoke and a song and dance routine. (p. 61–62)

The sexuality of Julie is in sharp contrast with another female character in the film, Usha. Though she has a minor role in the film, her portrayal is opposite to that of Julie. As Gangoli (2005) points out, the “demureness of Vikram’s sari-clad sister contrast with Julie’s sensuality and miniskirts. Julie is presented to the audience both as seductress and victim, knowing and innocent.” Usha in Julie can be seen clad in simple saris throughout the film. Her character, that of a morally superior and religious woman, is affirmed by the manner in which she is introduced to the audience. Both Usha and her mother Mrs. Bhattacharya are revealed to the audience while performing a Hindu devotional song right in the beginning of the film.

It is important to note that it is Usha and Mr. Bhattacharya that come to the rescue of Julie. Julie’s mother is against the marriage with Shashi and wants the baby to be left in an orphanage. She is also ready to leave India. It is at this time that Mr. Bhattacharya intervenes and reminds her that the baby belongs to her family too and should not be defined in terms of identities created by human beings. While the film was apparently about unwed motherhood, the monologue by Mr. Bhattacharya castigates Margaret for not accepting the baby because of his identity. He says to Margaret “have a look at the baby, and tell me whether he is a Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Indian or Anglo-Indian.” Mr. Bhattacharya is the saviour of Julie. Gangoli (2005) is of the opinion that the film is about the moral superiority of a Hindu family, as she writes,

the film reaffirms the moral superiority of the Hindu family, first, in the contrast between the poverty and unhappiness in Julie’s household headed nominally by her weak father but effectively by the dominant and unsympathetic mother; and, the cohesion and smooth running of the Hindu family headed by the patriarch. This is unspoken but no less effective. Second, the Hindu patriarch displays
his magnanimity by accepting a fallen Christian woman as a daughter-in-law, playing into the Hindu fundamentalist agenda of constructing Hinduism as universally tolerant and accepting. (p. 151)

4.4 Analysis of Selected Films from 1980 to 1990

As a sign of things to come, the first set of economic reforms were introduced in this decade and the Indian economy began to open up to private businesses. This was also the time period when colour television was introduced to the Indians, and the first generation of Indian television viewers saw Rakesh Sharma, India’s first cosmonaut. On being inquired as to how does India look from space, he says the iconic words “Saare jahan se achha” (better than the whole world).

The 1980s was also the decade of insurgencies, as the Punjab insurgency not only reared its head in this era, its outcome resulted in the assassination of Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984. It was in 1980s itself that the seeds of militant separatism in Kashmir were sowed. The decade also bears the mark of one of the greatest tragedies in Indian history, when a toxic gas accidentally released from a chemical plant in Bhopal killed thousands of people.

According to Somaaya et al. (2012), this decade saw the emergence of family socials with regressive characters, with commercial cinema passing through ‘dark-ages’. Films without solid plots or content, big-budgeted song numbers and fantastical sets were the order of the day. While commercial cinema was going through a low, art cinema continued to progress. Important art films such as Shyam Bengal’s Manthan (1980), Ketan Mehta’s Mirch Masala (1987), Govind Nihalani’s Ardh Satya (1983) and Saeed Akhtar Mirza’s Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyoon Aata Hai (1980) were made during this decade.

The female avenger rose in the decade of 1980s. Gulzar et al. (2013) write “any actress worth her make-up clamoured to get into the leather trousers of a female avenger, wielding a whip and gun as she mimicked a male hero.” The action hero figure established in the previous decade continued with his fight against corruption and injustice and Amitabh Bachchan scaled new heights during this era. Popular cinema continued to deny space to women characters with occasional exceptions, and marriage dramas with regressive characters became a popular genre. Keeping in mind
the strict codes of the censor board regarding nudity, the 1980s should be remember for one oddity – Mandakini’s waterfall song in *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985).

### 4.4.1 Prem Rog (The Disease of Love, 1982), Directed by Raj Kapoor

Directed by Raj Kapoor, the noted actor and auteur of Hindi cinema, this film marks Kapoor’s return to the depiction of social issues. Manorama ‘Rama’ (Padmini Kolhapure), belongs to an upper-class north Indian feudal family of *Thakurs* (high class *zamindars* or feudal lords). The family is presided by Bade Raja Thakur (Shammi Kapoor), who is the patriarch of the family and a commanding figure in the town. Next in hierarchy comes Chhote Thakur Virendra Singh (Kulbhushan Kharbanda), father of Manoroma. The females in the house include Badi Maa (Sushma Seth) – the senior lady of the family and a thoroughly religious woman – and Chhoti Maa (Nanda), Manorama’s mother.

Rama is pampered to a fault and saunters in town on a horse driven coach like a princess. She meets Devdhar ‘Dev’, cousin brother of Radha (Kiran Vairale), a maid in the house and the son of the local priest (Om Prakash) in hilarious circumstances. Dev instantly develops a liking for her. The young couple indulge in Bollywood-style frolics and while Dev is definitely in love with her, Rama being the naïve little girl only gives the impression that she loves him. Rama’s family fixes her marriage to Kunwar Narendra Pratap Singh (Vijayendra Ghatge), scion of a wealthy and powerful family of feudal lords. Rama is excited about marriage and soon is married with pomp and splendour. The film takes a bleak turn when on the fourth day of the marriage Rama’s husband dies in a road accident. A grief-stricken Rama returns to her home as a widow. Orthodox traditions that ostracize widows in Hinduism await her at the home, where she is greeted by a crowd of white-dressed widows, who are present to take part in the head-shaving ceremony that a widow must undergo according to ‘rituals’. She is saved from the humiliating ritual by her sister-in-law Raj Rani (Tanuja), who takes her back to her husband’s home. Rama’s stay at her in-law’s place is short-lived and traumatic, as one stormy night she is raped by Raja Virendra Pratap Singh (Raza Murad), her brother-in-law.

Rama once again returns to her home and has to live a life as a widow. She cannot indulge in good food, cannot use footwear, must wear white all the times and sleep in a bare room. All colours and zest from her life are drained and the erstwhile
princess lives the life of a pauper. Meanwhile, Dev has returned to the town and has not given up on his romantic ambitions. He tries to court a reluctant Rama, who time and again insists that she has changed and will not reciprocate his feelings. Dev is mocked and humiliated by the people of the town who are against him breaking the taboo, that is romancing a widow. Rama’s father, upon hearing his daughter’s alleged relationship, assaults Dev and viciously beat him. Rama’s father also intends to send her back to her in-law’s place. Rama’s rapist Raja Virendra Pratap Singh arrives to take her back. Meanwhile, Rama’s mother, Chhoti Maa informs Bade Raja Thakur that Rama has been raped. Bade Raja is horrified to hear the news and immediately summons Dev. He orders Dev to elope with Rama. Dev Refuses and says that he will marry her. Rama overhears her father’s and rapist Raja Virendra Pratap Singh’s plan to murder Dev and immediately rushes to inform him. Rama’s father arrives with his henchmen at Dev’s place and a chaotic fight take place. People of the town turn up to help Dev and a long action sequence takes place. By the end of the fight both Rama’s father and Raja Virendra Pratap are killed. It is Bade Raja Thakur that shoots and kills Raja Virendra Pratap. He gives his blessings to the couple and in the last scene of the movie we see Rama and Dev getting married.

Prem Rog, ostensibly a love story, is a commentary on the plight of widows in India. It is among a series of movies with female protagonists made by Raj Kapoor in the 1970s and 1980s. The film is roughly divided in two parts – the first half deals with Rama’s life as a carefree girl full of life and vitality and the other part deals with her life as a widow. The film introduces Rama as a naïve and pampered child of a royal family. In the first scene depicting Rama, she can be seen complaining to a servant about her slippers being moved from the designated position. Rama’s naiveté and innocence has been emphasized with great detail. She can be seen carelessly flirting with Dev without taking into account his feelings. While Raj Kapoor had a penchant for showing his heroines in a sexually attractive manner (a case in point, Mandakini in Ram Teri Ganga Maili, 1985), Rama’s sexual depiction has been kept to a minimum, though the audience is presented with several shots of cleavage in the film. In one song [Mohabbat hai kya cheez, (What is this thing called love)], we see Rama sitting beside a lake, dangling her feet in the water. The song is a fantasy-like sequence and Rama can be seen dancing seductively. To add to the sexual nature of the song, a belly dancer is also introduced. While Rama has been imbued with almost
Lolita-like qualities, her sexual naiveté is almost breath-taking. In a conversation with Radha, who has been recently married, she can be seen asking all sorts of innocent, albeit foolish questions.

After the death of Rama’s husband, her life turns upside down. She is forced to follow one orthodox ritual after another. It is important to note that it is women who are main enforcers of widow-related traditions in the movie. After she returns to her home, Rama is greeted with a sight of crowd of white-dressed widows in the courtyard of her home. The head of the group, a senior widow, is adamant about Rama getting her head shaved. She is the one who curses Rama for bringing bad luck to her husband’s family. The senior widow referring to the death of her husband says, “those who lost a son must be cursing their fate…they must have fixed this marriage in cursed times.” The only people who oppose the head shaving ceremony are Rama’s mother and her uncle, the patriarch of the house, Bade Raja Thakur. Her aunt, Badi Maa, is equally adamant about Rama following the ceremony. She says “we need to follow the rules and traditions…otherwise we would be ostracized by the community.” The shaving of the head is an age-old tradition in India, where women who have lost their husbands must be bare-headed after the death. The ritual is aimed towards making the widow sexually unattractive. The horror of the ceremony is aptly captured in the movie. In one shot, we see the barber’s hand sharpening a razor on stone and a petrified Rama looking at the razor. The shot continues and the barber places the blade on Rama’s forehead. Just as he is about to shear off the hair, Rama is saved when her sister-in-law Raj Rani enters and says “how could anybody think of shaving such beautiful hair.” It is important to note that the shaving of the hair is the only practice Rama opposes. She bears the rest of the orthodox practices without complaining. Tonsuring of the head as a practice originated in South India and is followed by upper class North Indian Hindus also (Nayar, 2006). Though the practice has abated somewhat, it is still followed in some parts of India.

Prem Rog captures the plight of widows in many scenes. Many rituals and practices that a widow is forced to follow are shown in the movie. For instance, widows are not allowed to wear any footwear. They must tread barefoot. In one scene, when Rama is getting ready for the head-shaving ceremony, she tries to slip her feet in sandals, only to find her maid removing the sandals and saying to her “you cannot wear this anymore.” As part of the traditions that are forced on a widow, Rama must
also not indulge in any gourmet food. She should satisfy herself with the simplest and
d blandest of food, as any sumptuous food might excite desire (“Smashed bangles and
no red sarees”, 2016). Rama also has to leave her well-decorated and comfortable
room for a room with the barest necessities. Reddy (2004) explains the plight of
widows in Problems of Widows in India
in India widowhood is not just transition from one marital status to
another after the death of the husband. Entering into widowhood is
more hazardous, painful and humiliating to a widow than to a
widower because of the discrimination, ritual sanctions of the society
against widows. With the result, widows in India not only suffer with
social and economic sanctions but also face many psychological
consequences, loneliness and in many cases deprivation causing
emotional disturbances and imbalance. (p. i)

Although Prem Rog does justice to the issue of widow-hood to an extent, by
raising it at least, the film’s focus, though, is on the practices and traditions, not on
Rama’s resistance. Rama bears all the humiliation and pain without complaining. The
most drastic change in her character is that she has turned religious inexplicably.
Before the death of her husband, Rama is sketched as a careless fun-loving girl. Later,
we see her going to temples and mentioning religious activities. No reason has been
given for her sudden change. Widowhood and religious nature seem to be
synonymous for her. During a conversation between Rama and Dev, he asks the
reasons behind her food being such a simple affair. Rama replies, “Badi Maa says this
kind of food is suitable for widows…it brings tranquillity to the soul and one is not
plagued by evil thoughts.” A visibly angry Dev says “this food assures that one lives
like a corpse.” The primary resistance to the practices forced on widows come from
Dev, not Rama. Dev, in Prem Rog, acts as a saviour to Rama and continuously speaks
against the orthodox traditions and blind faith that plagues Indian society. Perhaps,
Dev’s liberal nature comes from him being studying and pursuing PhD, as mentioned
in the movie. Dev is an idealist and an iconoclast in the movie. His dialogues and
actions continuously dismantle the old traditions. In one scene, when Rama is exiting
a temple, he brings sandals for Rama and slips them in her feet. The town people are
incensed and they try to humiliate him. Dev gives a befitting reply “can anyone of you
tell me if a girl has turned widow…is it because of her doing? The sun does not stop
giving its warmth to such women...the flowers do not stop giving their fragrance to such women...then why do you people force her to walk barefoot...eat insipid food...why cannot she laugh like other women...why cannot she be happy like other women!"

4.4.2 Zakhmi Aurat (Wounded Woman, 1988), Directed by Avtar Bhogal

_Zakhmi Aurat_ is perhaps the only known and remembered film of the director Avtar Bhogal, who made two more films on women-related issues, namely _Aaj Ki Aurat_ (1993) and _Honour Killing_ (2015).

The film opens up with a fast moving montage of newspaper clippings mentioning news stories of rape. Right from the first scene, the director makes it clear that rape is the central theme of the movie. Kiran Dutt (Dimple Kapadia) is a young and brave police officer. She is upright and hates criminals and crime with a vengeance. The movie establishes the character of Kiran with a long scene of her riding a motor cycle on busy roads with a flair and style usually reserved for male action heroes. While she dexterously manages the traffic perched on her motor bike, a song in the background – “she will protect herself...she is a woman of current times...gone are the days of dependence...she is a woman of current times – further establishes her character. The movie picks up pace after several scenes that establish the bravery and daredevil nature of the female police officer. Kiran saves a woman from a rape attempt and arrests the accused. The case goes to court where the rapist’s defence lawyer, a shrewd and smart advocate called Mahendra Nath (Anupam Kher), saves him from punishment by courtroom astuteness. Kiran and the rape victim are left devastated by the verdict. Immediately after the court room scene, a song intervenes and informs the audience that Kiran is deeply in love with Suraj (Raj Babbar), her fiancée, and the duo have got plans of marriage.

The police officer’s life is turned upside down when she is gang-raped by four criminal-type elements who enter her home at night and force themselves upon her. A traumatized Kiran is in hospital when she meets a helpful and caring doctor, Asha Mehta (Rama Vij). The narrative of the film takes a turn and the audience is introduced to Asha and her family. Asha has a school going daughter and a loving husband. Just after introducing Asha and her family to the audience, another rape happens in the film. The victim is Asha’s daughter. Her husband accuses her of being
careless with the child and leaves her. Meanwhile, Kiran is totally traumatized by the sexual assault and is trying to battle the mental trauma. It is at this time that she and Asha bond over as victims, and become friends. Kiran’s case goes to the court and this time, too, the accused are defended by the same defence lawyer, Mahendra Nath. Through employing falsehood and verbosity, the lawyer is shown saving the rapists for one more time.

The film introduces another rape victim. This time, it is the sister of a Hyderabadi woman called Salma. Her sister is in a stupor-like condition and Salma feels her pain too. Salma writes a letter to Kiran and shares her grief. Kiran is receiving many such letters from other women across the country and she along with Asha decide to call a meeting of all such women. A meeting is convened. All the present women share two things, a hatred for men who prey on women and complete disdain for the system which has repeatedly failed them. While the women are pondering on how to punish men who freely roam the streets and assault women with impunity, Asha, the doctor, provides a solution to the problem. The only way to punish such men and to deter others from committing sexual crimes is to castrate them. Soon, a plan is hatched. Kiran would use her powers as a police officer and provide details of rapists who were not convicted. The man would be targeted in a honey-trap-like manner and Asha being the doctor would castrate him. The plan is set into motion and the rapists are targeted in a meticulous manner. While the women vigilantes are targeting the men on street, another rape attempt occurs. This time it is the daughter of the advocate who specializes in saving rapists. The men, incidentally, are the same criminals whom he saved from punishment in Kiran’s rape case. Kiran being the upright police officer tracks down the criminals and saves the lawyer’s daughter. However, she makes it sure that he realises that as a lawyer he was doing a wrong and morally reprehensible work.

Salma, meanwhile, has locked down to another rapist, Sukhdev (Puneet Issar), the same criminal who was amongst the men who raped Kiran. He, like the rest of the rapists, is castrated. At this time in the film, doctor Asha finds the same man on the operating table who had raped her daughter. In a fit of rage, she murders him and commits suicide. Sukhdev, the rapist, is publicly humiliated on account of him being an ‘eunuch’. He attacks Kiran’s home once again, and in the ensuing action sequence shoots himself after being surrounded by police and Kiran.
The film once again moves to a courtroom scene. Kiran is being tried for being a vigilante and breaking the law. The lawyer, Mahendra Nath, has completely transformed himself and this time he is defending Kiran from the alleged crimes. Kiran accepts all allegations and delivers a passionate speech on the loopholes in the judicial system that rapists exploit to escape justice. Kiran’s fervour and uprightness impresses the audience. Suraj’s mother is in the audience and is moved by Kiran’s monologue. She has previously rejected Kiran as her daughter-in-law. Suraj’s mother publicly declares Kiran as her daughter-in-law. The film ends with a shot of Kiran’s silhouette running on a beach.

_Zakhmi Aurat_ clearly falls into the category of the rape-revenge genre. This particular genre has been popular in both Hollywood and Bollywood. In *Rape-Revenge Film: A Critical Study*, Heller-Nicholas (2011) offers a simple definition of rape-revenge genre, “at its most basic level, a rape-revenge film is one whereby a rape that is central to the narrative is punished by an act of vengeance, either by the victim themselves or by an agent”. While _Zakhmi Aurat_ aptly fits the definition, the act of vengeance is not solely directed against a single rapist, but Kiran’s ire is directed against the whole breed of rapists.

Castration may appear to be an extreme solution to the crime of rape, but the film’s answer to the issue of rape falls into the sensibilities of the time. The film was released in 1988, and film historian Firoze Rangoonwala defines this decade as the ‘age of violence’ (Rangoonwala, 1993; cited in Gopalan, 1997). The decade itself will be known for portrayal of women as ‘hardened, cynical, vengeful creatures’ in films such as _Commando_ (1985), _Sherni_ (1988), _Khoon Bhari Maang_ (1988), _Khoon Bahaa Ganga Mein_ (1988), etc. (Rahman, 1998; cited in Gopalan, 1997). Some critics have pointed to the unreal solution for rape offered by the film (Gopalan, 1997). A more nuanced and balanced solution may not have sit well with the audience, after all _Zakhmi Aurat_ is a Bollywood film and needs to pander to the commercial demands of the industry. And violence is an all-time hit formula for the success of any film, particularly a rape-revenge film. Moreover, the violence is hinted in a scene where Suraj is consoling a mentally traumatized Kiran. He hands over the Hindu religious book _Bhagvad Gita_ and a revolver to Kiran. In one shot, we see Kiran’s face in between the religious book and the gun. He exhorts her to use the book as her guiding principle and the gun as _Shakti_ or power.
Kiran in Zakhmi Aurat becomes an avenging woman and targets the rapists in a meticulous manner along with the help of other members of her group. Before she dons the role of a vigilante, it is pertinent to note that her character falls victim to the notions of purity, impurity and honour long associated with Indian women, both in cinema and in society. This is evident from the dialogue exchange between Kiran and Suraj. When he comes to meet her at the hospital, she says “everything has changed…me, you and this society…people who used to look at me with respect have hatred and sympathy in their eyes now.” She uses the analogy of ganga-jal (water from the river Ganges considered holy by Hindus) and alcohol to talk about ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’. She says, “even if you mix a drop of liquor in ganga-jal, the entire ganga-jal is polluted.” Doctor Asha consoles Kiran and says “you are punishing yourself for a crime you didn’t commit…being a doctor, I assure you that both your body and soul are still pure.” Unable to bear the mental trauma, Kiran is haunted by nightmares and she pleads Suraj to save her from the pain. Kiran’s conversation with Asha further explains her mental condition. She says “every day I try to wash this filth away, but it does not go…I am ashamed of myself.”

The stigma and shame associated with rape are further articulated by Suraj’s mother. Suraj is adamant about marrying Kiran, but his mother, after Kiran’s rape, is against the idea. She uses the word patita (fallen woman) to describe Kiran and says to Suraj “you won’t be the first man in her life.” She uses the example of Ahalya (a figure in the Hindu epic Ramayana. Wife of a sage, Ahalya is seduced by a god and cursed by her husband for infidelity, she is freed from the curse by Rama). Suraj’s mother further uses the example of the ‘ordeal by fire,’ Sita (consort of god Rama in Ramayana, and a highly revered Hindu deity) has to undergo in order to prove her chastity. The use of religious motifs by Suraj’s mother is an attempt to cast her as an orthodox woman who believes in the concept of ‘purity’ as defined by religious texts. She also uses society to justify her opposition to the marriage and voices her concern in Bollywood terms, “how will we face the society…how will we make the society understand?”

Kiran in Zakhmi Aurat has come a long way as a rape victim in Hindi cinema. In precolonial India, films that centred on rape victims often had the victim “living compromised lives and or committing suicide” (Gupta-Cassale, 2000). In postcolonial India, the condition of rape victims improved considerably, but the stigma
remained. In the Indian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, when denied justice within a corrupt and male-oriented legal system, “women’s response to the trauma of rape and violation had been passive disobedience, silent protest and initialization of shame and guilt to the point of madness or temporary hysteria” (Gupta-Cassale, 2000). As time progressed, the meek victim of the past transformed into a revenge-seeking woman, who would not stop until she has avenged. Kiran epitomizes such woman. However, Kiran’s journey from a traumatized rape victim to a merciless avenger is not seamless. She is helped in the journey by Suraj. “His emotional and moral support and unconventional assumption that their marriage would go ahead, represents a radical departure from the normal shocked reaction to such an experience in the popular cinema” (Vasudev, 1991). When Kiran is at the lowest ebb of her will and about to resign from the job, Suraj steps in and exhorts her not to give up and continue to fight. In a telling scene, Suraj gives a religious book, the Bhagvad Geeta, and a pistol to Kiran. The scene is significant because Suraj not only exhorts her to continue ‘radiating’ truth (her name Kiran literally means ‘ray’), but plays on the so-obvious symbolism of his own name, Suraj, which means sun: implying thus that she needs his light to radiate outward. He ends this scene by handing her the Bhagavad Geeta and her pistol, declaring, ‘Yeh rahe tumhaare siddhanth, aur ye rahee tumharee shakti’ (Here are your principles [to fight for justice] and here is your power). Equally revealing is the male-female dynamic, which is enacted in this scene: it is the male strength of principles and ideals that endorse her female energy, as symbolized even in the linguistic gendering of siddhantha as male noun, and shakti as female. He hands her the tools for her revenge; her feminist resistance has been sanctioned by male ideals. (Gupta-Cassale, 2000, p. 239)

Thus, it can be argued that the empowerment of Kiran came at the hands of a male. Another pertinent observation is that though Suraj encourages her to be an avenger, he does not help her in bringing about the change.
As compared to other films of the era that depicted a rape scene, such as *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (Scales of Justice, 1980), Kiran’s rape in *Zakhmi Aurat* was not sexualized. Gopalan (1997) writes

the rape scene returns to the bedroom familiar from *Insaaf Ka Tarazu*, but with a twist. Refusing to linger on Inspector Kiran Dutt’s body as the rapists strip her, the film instead focuses on the rapists as they tear down her jeans and fling them on the ceiling fan. The unrepresentativeness of the actual sexual act in this rape scene climaxes through a series of shot/reverse-shots of fetishized objects - the ceiling fan and a medium closeup shot of Kiran's screaming face. (p. 49)

Vasudev (1991) is also of the opinion that Kiran’s rape scene was not exploited for sexual purposes. He writes that Kiran’s rape is

a far cry from *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (‘The scales of justice’) made a decade earlier by one of Bombay's leading director-producers B R Chopra. The rape in this film of the glamorous star of the era, Zeenat Aman, is shown with a wealth of lascivious detail in which the camera becomes both voyeur and rapist. (p. 8)

*Zakhmi Aurat* is different from *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* in one more aspect. *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* “conformed to the comfortable notion that if a woman is raped she must have invited it, a notion strongly rejected in *Zakhmi Aurat*” (Vasudev, 1991). However, the film takes a detour when it comes to the picturization of another rape scene in the movie. Kiran is not the only woman to be raped in *Zakhmi Aurat*. The film is replete with rapes and attempt of rapes. Salma, Kiran’s friend and part of her group that wrecks vengeance on men, in order to lure a man to the operating table gets into the car of the rapist. The scene inexplicably breaks into a song, followed by a rain. Wet clothes and rain have long been used in Bollywood to sexualize and titillate the audience. It was not uncommon to find a rain song in many films of the 1980s. However, in *Zakhmi Aurat*, the rain is unnecessarily used to create sexual thrill in a scene depicting sexual assault. During Salma’s rape attempt, not only the rapist partially disrobes her, exposing the bare legs, the rain makes the visuals more sexually appeasing for the male audience.
Kiran confronts her rapist Sukhdev in the climactic scene and reminds him of the irreparable damage she has done to his masculinity. She says, “where will you run now? You have been rendered ‘useless’ for life. We castrated you and made you impotent. I could have killed you, but you will suffer a far worse punishment, you will live like an ‘incomplete-man’…we have ended your progeny.” Furious at the harsh words, the rapist retorts “it is you who have been destroyed…nobody will marry you now.” It is at this moment that Suraj intervenes and says “I will marry her.” Discussing this scene, Gupta-Cassale (2000) is of the opinion that it is the male’s (Suraj’s) validation that provides credence to Kiran’s fight against the system. “The sympathetic male ally, Suraj, comes to Kiran’s ‘rescue’ by publicly reaffirming his love and desire to marry her. Once again, the act of female resistance, no matter how legally culpable, is sanctioned on moral grounds as attested by the male sympathizer.” Gupta-Cassale (2000) further explains

This validation carries even greater social and symbolic resonance in the film because of the male ally’s high moral (fond and dutiful son) and professional (doctor) character. The ‘heroic’ liberalism expressed in his unflinching espousal of the heroine despite her ‘compromised’ situation would appeal to the idealistic sentiments of the very same spectator group that would disavow emulating it in the real world. (p. 240)

Gupta-Cassale’s (2000) explanation of the male validation holds water since in the last scene of the movie, when Kiran gives a passionate defence of her actions, we never hear the court’s verdict. Instead, Suraj’s mother steps forward and publicly accepts Kiran as her future daughter-in-law. Not only Suraj, but his mother also endorses Kiran’s actions.

4.5 Analysis of Selected Films from 1990 to 2000

The defining feature of this decade was the liberalization of the economy and the political, social and cultural changes it introduced. The decade would also be remembered for the rise of the right-wing forces in the country, one of the manifestations of which was the demolition of the Babri mosque and the communal riots that ensued. The Kashmir insurgency became another problem that India had to deal with in this time period.
Rise of the bourgeoisie family in India during the 1990s saw the enshrinement of middle-class values in Hindi cinema, with family dramas involving a romance getting mass approval from the audience. Romance, the staple diet of Bollywood, remained the defining feature, albeit the films became more slick and stylish. The films also began to show growing connection with west, with the Indian and Westernness often in direct clash. It was also the time for the test of Indian values across the transnational Indian family. It goes without saying that the Indian values prevailed. With the super success of \textit{Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jaenge} (1995), the Punjabi bhangra often became a common ingredient of Bollywood songs with a Punjabi setting for a story finding more space in Hindi films.

\textbf{4.5.1 \textit{Damini} (Lightning, 1993) Directed by Raj Kumar Santoshi}

The film is known for Meenakshi Sheshadri’s role as \textit{Damini} and considered as her best performance. She was nominated in the best actress category during the 39\textsuperscript{th} Filmfare awards. The director Rajkumar Santoshi won the best director award in the Filmfare Awards, followed by Sunny Deol who won the Filmfare as well as the National Film Award for the best supporting actor category.

Shekhar Gupta (Rishi Kapoor), a rich industrialist, meets and falls in love with Damini (Meenakshi Sheshadri), a small town dancer who comes from a poor family. She lacks money but is of ‘upright’ and ‘honest’ character. Shekhar convinces his reluctant family to let him marry her. A married Damini enters his home and finds myriad of characters – Mr. Gupta (Kulbhushan Kharbanda), Shekhar’s dad and a reasonable man, Mrs. Gupta (Rohini Hattangadi), his mother and a vamp-like woman, Shekhar’s younger brother, Rakesh (Ashwin Kaushal), a good for nothing spoiled brat, and Shekhar’s uncle (Tinu Anand). The young couple are enjoying a blissful married life. The peace in their life is shattered when Damini witnesses the rape of Urmi (Prajakta) – the maid of the house. Urmi is forcibly raped by Rakesh and his friends who take advantage of revelries during the festival of \textit{Holi}. Both Shekhar and Damini witness the act but are not able to help Urmi. The rapists, meanwhile, dump the body of Urmi on road. Shekhar and his father Mr. Gupta have not filed a police report, as they are concerned with the dishonour that would come to their family if the news became public. Damini, meanwhile, is traumatized with the experience and is shocked to hear that the family has not informed the police about the incident.
Shekhar temporarily convinces Urmi to be quiet about the rape. An adamant inspector Kadam (Vijayendra Ghatge) is investigating the affair and knows that Damini was an eyewitness to the crime. The inspector convinces Damini to come out with the truth, and Damini’s statement is recorded. Mr. Gupta has hired a cunning lawyer, Indrajit Chaddha (Amrish Puri), to defend his son. It is soon revealed that even the police have ulterior motives and are guided by greed to investigate the rape. Damini is confronted by Shekhar’s family for ‘betraying’ them. She is thrown out of the house. The case goes to the court and the shrewd lawyer Indrajit Chaddha manages to convince the judge that Damini is mentally unstable and cannot be relied upon. The judge adjourns the case for the time being and orders Damini to be interned in a mental asylum.

Damini’s experience in the asylum is horrific but she manages to escape. It is at this time that she meets Govind (Sunny Deol). An alcoholic former lawyer, Govind is also disillusioned with the system. He lost his wife in a hit and run case and could not get justice as the case became entangled in legal limbo. Damini narrates her story and convinces Govind to take up her case. Govind is an astute lawyer and an old foe of Indrajit Chaddha. The two legal hotshots clash in the courtroom and Govind gains the upper hand. Indrajit Chaddha, unable to win in the court, engineers an assault on Damini, hoping that she would be killed before she reaches the court. The attack is unsuccessful and Damini reaches the court in the nick of the time. Damini gives a passionate speech on the injustices meted out to common folks by the insensitive courts. She implicates everybody, the police, the judiciary and the rich, in making a mockery of the justice system. Damini’s monologue moves everybody including the judge who finally pronounces the verdict in favour of Damini and convicts all the rapists. The judge, as a tribute to Damini’s steadfastness, names the judgement after her.

Damini is shown as a crusader who would fight for the truth come hell or high water. The opening credits of the film have a text slide, bearing Mahatma Gandhi’s quote: “There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts”. Damini has been equated with Gandhi in the film, as it is her conscience that keeps her running and fighting for justice. She has been infused with all sets of qualities in the film that defines her as a righteous woman.
Damini is a commentary on how a woman’s body is exploited and if somebody fights for the justice, her voice, too, is silenced using patriarchal values (Pamecha, 2002). As Shekhar’s family members repeatedly use the word ‘honour’ to describe their situation. According to them, their ‘honour’ would be besmirched if Damini goes to court. Damini, however, is determined to speak the truth. She goes to court and punishment is meted out to the criminals. What propels Damini to be a relentless crusader in search for justice for a rape victim? Her truthfulness, uprightness and a conscience as defined by Mahatma Gandhi. But the single more important reason is that she, as a woman, is able to relate to the victim. Damini is so traumatized by the experience of being a witness to the rape that she is haunted by nightmares. In one of the horrifying dream sequences, she imagines herself in Urmi’s place. Rape is a crime with many consequences – one of them is that it often results in a protracted legal battle, humiliation and public exposure (Pamecha, 2002). Though the number of reported cases of rape in India are rising, many rape cases in India are not reported. The victim’s family wants to avoid the limelight and humiliation that comes from being a rape victim in Indian society. Damini captures the horror of a rape litigation in detail. During the trial, when Damini is standing in the witness box, Indrajit Chaddha insists on revealing the gory details of the crime. He asks “where were the hands of the alleged rapists…on the legs or on the thighs?” He repeatedly grills her on other such details. During the climactic scene of the movie, Damini finally answers such questions and says to Indrajit Chaddha “the portion beneath the neck is called bosom, and it is from here that a mother feeds her new-born.” Using rather brilliant dialogues, Damini makes it clear to the lawyer and to the public that a woman’s body is not merely a rapist’s playground, that it cannot be reduced to sexual terms only, that a woman’s body has a greater function, namely to nourish and sustain new life.

Unlike many other films depicting rapes, the rape scene in this film has not been sexualized. As Chatterji (1998) explains, the rape scene in Damini “is shot beautifully, without a single graphic shot of the rape, the wall behind getting splattered with blood, and the sounds of the Holi revelry effectively drowning the anguished cries of the girl and of Damini.” Chatterji (1998) further adds that “Damini discreetly and rightly resists the temptation of reducing the rape trial into a pornographic melodrama with the court taking the place of proscenium.” The film’s
focus, instead, is on the psychological impact of the rape. This impact, however, has not been channelized on Urmi, the actual rape victim, but on Damini. The film is different from other rape films in another aspect. Damini does not offer a solution that involves breaking the law. Instead, all solutions to the issue of rape have been provided within the ambit of law. Moreover, the film taking pot-shots on the establishment, judiciary, media and the police makes it clear that they have failed the victims of rape repeatedly. The film also mentions the public who is often silent and urges the people to follow their conscience, as according to Mahatma Gandhi ‘No court is higher that one’s conscience’. While the film may sound like a bit melodramatic at places, according to Pamecha (2002), this is a film with social message and the “story borrows a great deal from reality.” It should be noted that like all films involving a woman fighting her battle, in Damini, too, the woman has a partner who helps her, a male. In the film, we find the lawyer Govind’s role as that of a supporter to Damini’s cause. Damini according to Rajan (2000) qualifies “women’s autonomous resistance by including male partners to witness, support and legitimize their actions.”

When Damini is exploited, forced into an asylum, and subjugated by the system, we see her in a different form. In one scene, we see Damini performing the *tandava* (divine dance performed by lord *shiva*). The dance can be a source of creation or destruction. Damini takes the cue to dance after witnessing a crowd taking an idol of goddess *Durga*. The message is clear: Damini will take the form of *Durga*—the slayer of evil. Chatterji (1998) explains the scene:

> the rising crescendo of a procession engaged in taking an actual idol of Durga for immersion motivates her to run away. As she begins to run, she is chased, the chase itself is preceded by a scene of Damini’s apotheosis. She assumes the form of the phallic mother goddess as a forewarning of the inevitable fact that if she does not try to free herself she will be killed. (p. 48--49)

The use of religious motifs to portray women, particularly to depict the wrath of women in Hindi cinema, is not a new phenomenon. Hindi films evoke mother goddesses to depict a range of women’s emotions such as motherhood and anger. The use of goddesses *Durga* and *Kali* are common when the filmmaker wishes to show an
avenging woman or a righteous woman about to correct the wrongs and injustices inflicted on her. Chatterji (1998) is of the opinion that a chiefly man-managed film industry is responsible for the “use misuse and abuse of myth to create, exaggerate and distort a female character.” It is true that in the Hindi film industry all aspects of film production, from creation of content to distribution of prints, are managed by men, but what connection does this have with the portrayal of women as mother goddesses? Perhaps, the answer lies in the man’s inability to see women in normal human terms. She will either be oppressed, exploited or raped, or she will rise as Kali or Durga to destroy all her enemies. Women characters in Hindi cinema as created by male scriptwriters and male directors will live the life in extremes, ultimately upholding the image of women as envisaged by a man. The obsession with mother goddesses can also be explained in terms of Hindi cinema’s attempt to push forward a dominant cultural narrative, a narrative that only has space for the elite, rich, powerful and upper class Hindus. It is in this narrative that mother goddess of upper class Hindus appear and reappear in Hindi films. This can be further explained by the success of Hum Aapke Hain Kaun (1994), the definitive hit film of the decade. Calling it “the most Banal superhit in the history of Indian cinema,” Bharucha (1995) explains the movie: “this is a film that is obviously in tune with the ‘liberalization’ of our times, while being thoroughly grounded in the signs of a homogenized, upper class, upper caste Hindu constituency.”

4.5.2 Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (I Have Given My Heart Away Darling, 1999), Directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali

Released in the penultimate year of the decade, Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam was a success both in terms of commercial achievements and at the 45th Filmfare awards, where it was nominated in multiple categories. The film grabbed the Filmfare for the Best Film, Best Director, Best actress, Best Playback Singer, Best Background Score and the Best Choreography award category. The film was also an important breakthrough for Aishwarya Rai.

Sameer (Salman Khan), a singer, has come to India from Italy to learn the craft of classical music from a veteran music maestro Pundit Durbar (Vikram Gokhale). The maestro is the patriarch of a large Gujrati family where various members of the extended family live in happiness. Nandini (Aishwarya Rai), daughter
of Pundit Durbar, is loved by all and is a girl full of life and vitality. Sameer is
besotted by Nandini at the first meeting and the couple fall in love in typical
Bollywood fashion. Nandini’s family has fixed her marriage with Vanraj (Ajay
Devgan). A lawyer by profession, Vanraj is a simple man who lacks the looks and the
good voice that Sameer has. There is an incident that disturbs the otherwise happy
family. One of the daughters of the family, Anupama (Sheeba Chaddha), unhappy
with her married life, elopes with her lover. The males of the family including her
father and Pundit Durbar are incensed and see this as an affront to the family’s
honour. Incidentally, a jealous aunt complains to Pundit Durbar about Nandini’s
romance with Sameer. An enraged Pundit Durbar immediately seeks Nandini, only to
find her in a loving embrace of Sameer. Pundit Darbar, in lieu of Gurudakshina (a
Vedic concept; the traditional repaying of a student’s debt after the completion of
studies), asks Sameer not to ever meet or try to meet Nandini. A heartbroken Sameer
leaves for Italy. Nandini, too, is aggrieved and braces herself for the coming marriage
with Vanraj. They are married, but Nandini is not able to accept Vanraj and her
behaviour remains cold and aloof. Perplexed, Vanraj repeatedly asks Nandini the
reason behind her aloofness. He soon finds the reason – a love letter Sameer wrote to
Nandini. Initially enraged at the discovery, Vanraj makes a strange choice for a
husband. He decides to leave for Italy along with Nandini in order to find her lost
love, Sameer.

The film moves to the picturesque locations of Italy (actually shot in
Budapest, Hungry), where the married couple try to locate Sameer. They try
unsuccessfully for a long time but are unable to locate Sameer. Nandini and Vanraj
meet an unfortunate incident in the form of a robbery and Nandini is shot and injured.
Vanraj nurses Nandini lovingly and the couple move somewhat closer. Soon, they are
able to locate Sameer and it was decided that Nandini would surprise Sameer at a
musical event. Sameer and Nandini finally meet, but surprisingly Nandini confesses
that she no longer loves him. The film ends with Vanraj putting the mangalsutra
(means holy thread, is a neck ornament worn by Hindu married woman during the
life-time of her husband and is never removed) on Nandini and embracing her.

Director Sanjay Leela Bhansali has a penchant for love stories and making
grand sets. This film is no different. He is also known for giving more screen space
Nandini’s character has been roughly divided in two parts in the film. The first part deals with Nandini as a careless and youthful maiden, and the second part is about Nandini as a sober and sombre wife. Nandini as a maiden has been infused with characteristics that Bollywood uses for women in films involving family and love affair, for example Nisha in *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994). Such girls are loved by all the members of the family. They are fun-loving persons who like to indulge in youthful antics and jokes. Usually, no mention is made about their education or other social achievements. They are invariably defined in terms of an obedient daughter or a sweet sister. Their sole use is to provide a lively and youthful contrast to their parents, usually, the father, the head of the family and a big achiever in terms of success and money. The film introduces Nandini with a song, whose lyrics call her a ‘wonder of nature’ and whose beauty is incomparable. The song is more like a paean of feminine beauty and we see Nandini’s youthful beauty in its full glory. Nandini is more captivating in the song, because the song has been filmed in dry and parched landscapes of a desert. A deliberate contrast has been created, where Nandini performs a “spectacular dance-play in the middle of the desert, bringing out her innocence, beauty and vitality all at the same time” (Cliofi, 2011).

Clothes, the age-old tool of defining a woman in Bollywood, are used once again to define Nandini. Since she belongs to a traditional Gujarati family, she is dressed in *Ghagra Choli* throughout the film until her marriage. The moment she is married, we see her attire change to sober saris.

_Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam_ belongs to a series of Hindi films made in the 90s that depicted a large upper class Hindu family, which spoke about traditions, culture and the patriarch’s ultimate control over the lives of the females of the family. In the film when it is discovered that one of the women of the house (Nandini’s cousin Anupama) has transgressed, Pandit Darbar calls a meeting and says “a girl can only marry with the consent of her father…after the marriage a husband should be everything for a woman…this has been the tradition in this family.” When Nandini tries to raise some protest, she is told not to interfere. Pandit Darbar exerts his power on Nandini and forces her to marry Vanraj, a man she does not love. Even Nandini’s
mother is not sympathetic to her and says, “I did not expect this from you…what have you done? Nobody has the right to love in this family…after all there are certain traditions of this family. Your father is a respected man…his head hangs in shame because of you.” Nandini’s mother further calls Sameer a foreigner, whose family and lineage is unknown. Nandini’s mother is also interested in knowing whether she had any sexual relations with Sameer. She asks Nandini, “have you done something which will shame us? Has he touched you?” Nandini points towards her wrist and then moves her finger to her lips…her mother, aghast, pushes her…Nandini yells, “he has touched my soul.” Nandini’s mother is not interested in the psychological trauma her daughter is facing. Her point of concern is her daughter’s virginity. Nandini’s mother, an embodiment of the patriarchal norms in the upper class household of Pandit Darbar, seems obsessed with virginity, which specifies the characteristics of Indian patriarchy and its long obsessions with virginity. It is patriarchal interest in virginity that is further related to the concept of honour and purity. As Pandit Darbar says when an aunt complains about Nandini and Sameer, “Nandini is as pure as my music, and if there is any flaw in Nandini I will leave music forever.” Music for Pandit Darbar is his bread and butter. It is because of music that he has an exalted status in the family and in the society. Music is also his honour. Indeed, he leaves the profession of music after he discovers that Nandini is romantically involved with Sameer. The message is implicit – his ‘honour’ has been soiled because Nandini is no longer ‘pure’. By associating a woman with concepts of purity and honour, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* leaped into a dangerous territory. It is pertinent to note that honour killing, “extreme acts of domestic violence culminating in the murder of a woman by her family or community” (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007), is a growing problem in India, particularly in northern India. Many high-profile cases have come to the limelight where a woman and usually her lover or husband are brutally killed on the name of bringing ‘dishonour’ to the family by loving, or marrying, somebody outside of their caste or religion.

After the marriage, Nandini remains detached to her husband. She does not reciprocate his feelings or his sexual interest. In one scene, when Vanraj is trying to make love to her, a disgusted Nandini pushes him away. A dumbfounded Vanraj says “we are married”, to which Nandini replies by removing the *pallu* of her sari. She offers her body in a crude gesture. A righteous Vanraj is aghast at his wife’s actions.
He avers “marriage is not a union of two bodies, it is the union of two souls as well.” Vanraj’s sacrificial nature and uprightness is further established during a conversation between Vanraj and his father. Vanraj says to his father, “Nandini does not belong to me…she loves somebody else…do you want me to live a life of pain so that the society remains satisfied? His father retorts, “you belong to a Rajput family…you are a man…you cannot control your woman…where is your masculinity? Vanraj replies, “is suppressing a woman…controlling her happiness a form of masculinity? You can only control a woman’s body through masculinity…you cannot control her heart and her soul.”

When Nandini continues with her cold behaviour towards Vanraj, her mother intervenes. Nandini protests and says that she will never consider Vanraj as her husband. Nandini’s mother also questions as to why she is not wearing the mangalsutra. She says to Nandini, “for you, these are just beads of black pearl…the day you realize the power of these pearls, you will understand the power of mangalsutra…it has a lot of powers.” Nandini replies, “for you this may hold power...for me it is a burden.” Nandini’s reply is atypical of wives in Bollywood. Nandini breaks a taboo and has the courage to question the holiness of an article that has been sanctified by manusmriti (ancient Hindi legal text) itself. Hindi cinema has long sanctified marriage and marriage-related artefacts such as mangalsutra. The opinion of Nandini’s mother on the ‘power’ of mangalsutra fits aptly to the part of Hindi cinema’s obsession with all things marriage. In the end of the movie, however, Nandini’s mother stands corrected, and the film ultimately does prove the power of mangalsutra. Calling mangalsutra a symbol, Kaul (2016) writes that “these overt symbols stand as simple manifestations of the much larger patriarchal ideology of gender roles and expectations, and thereby the preservation of an essentialised Indianness.”

Initially, Nandini had refused to even consider Vanraj as his husband. In a relatively short period of time, she completely changes. Despite meeting Sameer, she chooses to go with Vanraj. What makes her change her decision? The only other noteworthy thing to happen during Vanraj and Nandini’s stay in Italy is the robbing incident during which Vanraj takes care of his wife. This short scene is the explanation given by the filmmakers to explain a change in Nandini’s heart. The biggest explanation, it seems, is the mangalsutra itself. When Nandini returns to
Vanraj, we see her opening her fists to reveal the *mangalsutra*, the same *mangalsutra* that she had derided before. Vanraj takes the *mangalsutra* and puts it around her neck, while Sanskrit hymns are echoing in the background. Rao (2002) explains Nandini’s decision

*Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*’s self-consciously colourful ethnicity allows Aishwarya Rai to rediscover the sanctity of her *mangalsutra* when the noble self-sacrificing, pucca desi husband seeks to reunite her with her first love who is an insouciant, half-Italian Romeo. Such Transgression, however tastefully wrapped in visual opulence, is disturbing when it comes from an undeniably talented filmmaker like Sanjay Leela Bhansali. (p. 111)


[T]here is no change of heart on the parts of parents here as in *DDLJ*; the change occurs in the woman herself, who gradually falls in love with her husband so that in the end “arranged love marriage” is granted privilege over love marriage. . . in the realm of scopic desire the symbology of the *mangalsutra* (the auspicious thread tied by the bridegroom around his bride’s neck) plays a decisive role. (p. 259)

*Mangalsutra*, though a religious artefact, is also a tool of patriarchy to control a woman’s life and her desires. In *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, it is Nandini herself who chooses the *mangalsutra*, and her husband, thereby not only affirming the sanctity of marriage but also validating patriarchal norms. Her decision holds even more weight as she is the same person who earlier called *mangalsutra* a burden. She, according to the filmmakers, returns to her senses and realises for herself the power of the ‘black beads’ of *mangalsutra*. 

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