CHAPTER 4

FILM ANALYSIS:

THE 1980s

The chapter will highlight some of the major films from both the genres from their thematic, aesthetic, and individualistic point of view. A few films are taken from the decade of the 80s when the Parallel cinema was at its peak in the Hindi cinema and when an era in the Commercial cinema was also changing its popular films due to the change in attitude of the audience of the country.

While new artists were shaping the New Wave Movement including Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, Farooq Sheikh, and other theatre artists, commercial cinema was also booming with the concept of ‘angry young man’ and ‘dream girl’. Although the contrast between the two genres of the Hindi cinema was quite distinct still both the cinemas were somehow moving parallel with each other for straight two decades, which is the 70s and the 80s.

Media has always been criticised of their sexist representation of women and neglecting the core feministic issues in their contents. Women have been portrayed mostly in a negative light in movies, and when it comes to commercial cinema there is always a kind of victimisation of women whether depicting them as protagonists or as small characters. Julia Lesage once analysed a sexist film, *Broken Blossoms* (1919) by D. W. Griffiths, and said, “How is it I can be emotionally involved in a work that victimises women? As a woman I must ask how the media can so seduce me that I enjoy, either as entertainment or as art, works that take as one of their essential ingredients, the victimisation of women.”

Similarly a book by Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (1971), highly criticised the mass production of romantic fictions for women that falsely show women utopian world and let them believe into heterosexual fairy tales and romance.

However, once we move on to the movies in the New Wave Cinema, particularly known as the Parallel Cinema, we can see that equal screen time is devoted to the female characters. They were more realistic and females were given strong and
powerful roles. They were not only used as objects, rather they were dealt as subjects in a movie.

Women are generally associated with nature and are considered as passionate. Many feminists, including Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, argue that female roles are limited to be linked with animal functions and nature. Whereas many other argue that a female’s role is associated with nature as it is constructed from a particular political vantage point.

Many Cultural feminists argue that it is the male viewpoint that decides the position of a female in a society. Apparently that is the main reason why feminine characteristics are undervalued. Though in the present scenario, Cultural feminists appreciate those feminine characteristics in their own ways, for instance, a female’s passivity becomes her peacefulness, sentimentality becomes her tendency to nurture, and her subjectivity becomes her advanced self-awareness. Hence, the Cultural feminists have not stopped defining women but they have only changed the definition given by men.

Therefore, Cultural feminism is an ideology where female characteristics are re-evaluated with a viewpoint which is not male oriented. They try to revalidate the undervalued feminine characteristics and attributes. They believe that society and economic institutions are not the only enemy of females, but in many cases it is the backwardness and the biased beliefs of males that are responsible for negating feminine traits.

An Australian feminist scholar, Dale Spender, while discussing the patriarchal society where males are dominant and females are muted or suppressed said, “it has been the dominant group – in this case, males – who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap that is in their interest… The group which has power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited.”

Gender division occur in every society in different ways. However, many feminists disagree with the concept of essentialism which “reflect and reproduce dominant cultural assumptions about women, which not only fail to represent the variety in
women’s lives but promote unrealistic expectations about ‘normal’ female behaviour that most of us cannot satisfy.”

Movies also reflect the doctrine of essentialism where heroines are depicted in a particular manner and the audience are influenced to socialise their daughters and females around them in the same way. Electronic media, especially films are supposed to provide women with positive and liberating role models rather than stereotyping them into categories of good or bad girl.

Feminists often argue that films should portray the reality of women on the screen but they are divided among themselves when it comes to discuss exactly what the reality of a woman’s position and nature is. Therefore, even before the media could show the reality of women, it has to be defined in an unbiased way what that reality is for the feminists.

Charlotte Brunsdon once said, “For feminists to call for more realistic images of women is to engage in the struggle to define what it meant by ‘realistic’, rather than to offer easily available ‘alternate’ images. Arguing for more realistic images is always as argument for the representation of ‘your’ version of reality.”

Laura Mulvey has written her article Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema which was published in 1975, it was the most reprinted article in film theory. It is also been called ‘the founding document of psychoanalytic feminist film theory’. It instantly became popular during the 70s and 80s and there were hardly any feminist analysis of films without having a psychoanalytical approach. This article helped in exploring the media construction of women as spectacle, the gender of gaze and voyeuristic pleasure.

Mulvey says that cinematic construction of female characters is directly related to the patriarchy. She further adds, “Film reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.”

Throughout the years, there has been a changing trend in the portrayal of women in the Indian films. Movies at the initial years of the cinema were made in a different way as compared to the movies made in the 70s or 80s and from then those made in
the recent times. At first the movies revolved around the struggles of common man but then gradually the focus shifted to romance, action, and then comedy.

Cinema expresses a complete mixture of myth and reality when showing fiction or non-fiction. Since the time of its inception, cinema must have entertained more than millions of people all around the globe. Though, Indian cinema is said to be a reflection of its culture and ethos many a times Indian cinema is criticised for becoming an escape mechanism that is not at all closely related to the reality. Much of such depiction is based on the filmmakers and their way of direction.

The female protagonists, however, also kept changing since then but on a rather slow pace when it comes to their depiction as characters. Female protagonists in Hindi commercial cinema were depicted in a stereotypical way. The good girls are fully clad wearing beautiful ornaments and are shy and obedient. Whereas, if you see a girl wearing short skirt and is not loyal or obedient, she either needs to be tamed by the male hero or will die till the end. Though, in the past few years the roles of females in Hindi movies have taken a full U-turn in terms of treatment and characterisation.

Veteran actor Shabana Azmi when asked about the changing trends of the Hindi film heroines said, “In the 1960s, there was a film called Main Chup Rahungi, which in indicative of the nature of heroines till then. In the 1980s there were vendetta films like Zakhmi Aurat and Sherni. It is only recently that meaningful roles are being written for women and heroines are coming into their own.”

Although the movie Main Chup Rahungi depicted a female who was passive and servile and any feminist would become repulsive towards such a depiction but it can also be seen as an important statement of protest. The protagonist chose to remain silent purposefully to make her position visible. Also as Indians we are aware of the Gandhian demonstrations which clearly stated that silence is the most potent weapon of resistance, and who would know that better than Shabana Azmi who in her first movie Ankur, where she was given only a few dialogues with a deaf and mute husband by her side, brought about a whole new revolution in the world of cinema.

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1 *Asian Age*, 27 March 2005
1970s was the decade where objectification of women was at its peak. Though there were several movies in the past decades where women were only shown as flesh around the men, 70s was an era where such things moved a few steps ahead.

An American film producer, Hunt Stromberg, once famously quipped, “Boys, I’ve got an idea. Let’s fill the whole screen with tits.”

Apparently some Indian filmmakers took this phrase quite seriously. One of them was Raj Kapoor, who made a number of films in his career and during the 70s used women as mere objects for the audience to lust for. *Mera Naam Joker* (1970), *Bobby* (1973), and *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978) are some of his movies where he has made full use of women and their bodies.

The way female protagonists were dressed in the movie was something that was completely new to the Indian cinema. Simi Grewal when seen in a soaking wet dress in the movie *Mera Naam Joker*, the audience could not stop lusting for her in the cinema halls. In the same movie Padmini’s shirt was seen torn and half of her breast could be clearly seen in a glimpse. And if that was not enough of flesh seen in the movie, there was again Padmini seen in a blouse-less and bra-less saree which was soaked in water, showing more than what was intended.

Same goes with *Bobby* where for the first time a teenager was seen wearing short skirts and hot pants throughout the movie. Dimple Kapadia was even seen in a tiny two piece swimsuit and whatever was left to imagination was clearly be imagined with the help of the famous song “*Hum tum ek kamre me band ho, aur chaabi kho jaye...*”.

Similarly, movies like *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* and *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* showed Zeenat Aman scantily clad or wearing tight fitting clothes that could easily reveal her assets.

The 80s, however, was an era that was brimming with parallel movies. Social issues were dealt with precision and were appreciated by the audiences as well. Here are some of the commercial and parallel movies of the 80s and the details about the female representation in each one of them.
Film Analysis

LAAWARIS

The movie Laawaris (1981) directed by Prakash Mehra depicted a story of a young man who was an orphan and tried to find the meaning of his life through the various tests of life. He stumbled on his way to find out the truth about his parents and wrestles with life all through his youth.

While the movie opens with an independent female singer who in the beginning itself is criticised. It is shown that if a woman is single and earning, she would not come under the societal norms of being a ‘good girl’ as was shown in the movie of her having illicit relationship with Ranvir.

Then on the other hand when the character of Mohini is shown it was being criticised on the grounds that if a woman is rich, she would be spoilt and can become a better person only when domicile.

In both these avatars, women shown in the movie are pathetic and weak since their existence is based on the acceptance of a man, either acceptance as a wife, or as a mother, or as a girlfriend.

Since the starting of the movie it has been established that the child is parentless but still it is mostly emphasised that he is fatherless, not once was he unhappy for the fact that he did not have a mother too. Several times in the movie the dialogues implied the importance of a father in child’s life. The filmmaker did not care to show the importance of a mother as well.

The only mother shown in the film was Mahendar’s mother played by Bindu but she was an insensitive and selfish mother as shown in the movie. Other females that were shown in the movie were not given much importance, including the main lead, Mohini.

In a particular scene, Heera ill-treated Mohini but was not shown as a villain because he got a justification of being called a ‘lawaaris’ by her first. He was seen as an emotionally hurt person who tried to show his pain and sufferings to Mohini in a harsh way. Though one cannot justify misbehaving with a woman still the filmmaker showed Heera in a strong light by depicting the female as the one who was wrong.
He blamed Mohini for judging him too quickly even getting to know him. He said, “Har gunah ke peechhe gunahkaar kaun hai, yeh koi nahin janta” (No one knows who is behind an evil action) depicting how easy it is to judge people before one got to know the whole story behind the circumstances. In this way he justified his actions of misbehaving with her while complaining about how rough life has been to him.

Mahendar’s sister was also seen longing for her brother’s love which was given by Heera and not her own brother. And another female, Shanno, who was the potter Ram Singh’s sister, was also seen as a fragile and vulnerable one who committed suicide after Mahendar raped her. Females in the movie are shown in a weak light where they were dependent upon the males for their security.

As it has been a common notion of the society that a woman cannot protect herself and she would always need a male for her security and protection. This movie is also propagating the same notion throughout the movie by depicting the vulnerability of women in every step.

**BAZAAR**

In 1982, Sagar Sarhadi directed Bazaar, which literally means ‘marketplace’. The movie was a crude description of how the patriarchal world uses its phallic power in controlling and oppressing women all over.

The movie had some many realistic dialogues and one of them was uttered by a character Nasreen when she commented, “Aap log to ladkiyon ko aise dekhte hain
"jaise nilaam me samaan" (Boys look at girls as if they are objects for sale). It describes the gaze of the boys and the way women think that they are considered as no more than mere objects in front of them.

It is a beautiful movie depicting how cheap a woman in our society is. She can be given to anyone for free but if someone bids for her all the people who have daughters were willing to sell them as they have needs and what is a girl for them? Only a way to fulfil their needs.

One of the main characters, Najma also said, “Aap ke bazaar me sabse sasti koi cheez hai na, to woh hai aurat” (The cheapest thing in this market is a woman) referring to the status of women in the society.

Najma is seen as a strong woman from the outside but from the inside she is afraid to be let alone in the big bad world. She has lost some of the best years of her life to an ungrateful man and now when she is nearing the end of her youth she did not want those years to be regarded as wasted.

However, she was as guilty as the other men who were involved in this bidding game of women but she had a selfish reason of making Akhtar happy who will in turn make her happy by marrying her.

Saleem was a voice of a realist. He criticises the ugliness of the patriarchal world and the males who has made such societal norms which are in their favour and has to be followed by everyone. He said, “Shaadi jism bechne aur khareedne ka woh pesha hai jise kanoon aur samaaj ki himayat hasil hai.” He knew the hypocrisy of the society and on every step kept on commenting on it and criticising it.
Saleem encouraged Najma to stop depending on others for happiness. He gave her strength and determination that she could make a mark of her own if she broke the shackles of bondage that were put by people like Akhtar who had been falsely promising her for years that he would marry her.

Najma in the end seemed to have taken Saleem’s advice and took a brave step by leaving Akhtar once and for all. She had been with Akhtar because she did not want to demean herself by being a sex worker as her mother had suggested. But with Akhtar also she was not more than that. He had been using her for years and Najma thought one day they would get married and the society would accept them as their own.

Najma was seen here as not more than a woman who was been raped by a man on the pretext of getting married to her one day. Such a notion is nowhere in any religion but the society often accepts a person if he raped a woman and then marry her afterwards. It shows as a kind of atonement for the crime. Many a time rapists have offered their victims to marry as an extra legal step which is not mentioned anywhere in the law. This idea is welcomed by many including the victims because the internalisation of stigmatisation for life is deeply ingrained in the victim and they thought that by marrying their rapists is the only way out.

However, in reality it is the victimisation of the victim all over again. The act of marrying a rape victim is also favourable for the rapist because the woman would withdraw her allegations and the rapist could go scot-free. While this act has been rooted in the ancient history and it is more of a gender issue than a religious one. Susan N. Herman, who is the professor of Law in Brooklyn Law School once wrote about it that “In some ancient societies, women were treated as a form of property and rape was defined as an offence against the property owner – the woman’s father or husband – not against the woman herself.”

Hence, some are lost in this bazaar while some abandon it for good. But overall it showed the reality of the people around us and how the social norms are skilfully moulded by its makers who are mainly the patriarchal rulers for centuries now.

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Mahesh Bhatt’s directorial venture *Arth* (1982) basically deals with marriage, infidelity, and divorce. Although all these subjects were dealt with sincerity and the characters were realistic in their portrayal. The movie revolved around a couple, *Pooja* and *Inder*, where *Inder*’s infidelity was exposed and *Pooja* tried to hold her ground by struggling to find the true meaning (*arth*) of her life.

Two sides of the story is represented in the movie and surprisingly both the sides are shown through two different females’ point of view. The movie depicts women in a very influential and strong light. While giving advice to her maid of leaving her alcohol ridden adulterous husband, little did *Pooja* knew that soon she would also be suffering in the same way her maid had suffered. And showing the world how brave she was, *Pooja* left the house she had decorated herself only because it was bought by *Kavita*, the actress who was having an affair with *Inder*.

It was her new friend *Raj* who had helped her in getting a job so that she could earn money for survival in this ugly society with respect and honour. *Pooja* found a new meaning in her life and though she had been hurt by her husband on more than one occasion, still she continued to smile and decided never to give up. It was her strong will and determination that was highlighted throughout the whole story.

On the other hand the guilty conscience of *Kavita* was making her into a psychological patient because she could not bear the burden of living with a man who once was happily married. Her paranoid nature was a proof that she always had an unconscious anxiety of being in *Pooja*’s place in the future if *Inder* would leave her just as he did to his wife.

In the end, *Kavita* could take no more and frantically asked *Inder* to end the relationship which was unbearable for both of them. *Inder*, having a common notion of this patriarchal world, thought that he could go back to *Pooja* and they could start afresh by forgetting this whole episode. But unfortunately *Pooja* had moved on and simply asked him what if she would have done all that what he had done to her and then have returned to him, would he be able to accept her? And he realistically replied that he would not have accepted her. It clearly showed the hypocrisy of males in this society where males are always accepted but it is the females that have to suffer and face the hardships.
The movie was from the genre of the parallel cinema but the treatment of the movie was not like the ones from the 70s. This new era brought about some new changes in this genre. The introduction of songs/ghazals can be seen in these films. Also the lighting and camera angles of the scenes became similar to those of the commercial films. In one of the ghazals in the movie, ‘Jhuki jhuki si nazar’, the focus on Pooja’s eyes were made through the lights in the room which was a commercial tool to highlight the effect of drama.

Though in the beginning of the movie Pooja was seen a submissive person who cried and begged her husband to stay with her was in the end became a strong person who was ready to take life as it comes and did not want to be dependent on any other male for that matter. She kindly refused Raj’s proposal because she was not ready to surrender her feelings for another male even if he was as good as Raj was.

Her self-sufficiency was not limited to her own self, she even promised her maid to take care of her daughter as well after her maid killed her husband and went to jail. This showed her building self-confidence and her willingness to do good to others who have been suffering in the hands of fate for too long just like her.

It was Raj who accepted the rejection open heartedly and said, “Jo saahas tumhare andar jaaga hai wohi jeevan ka sahi arth hai” commenting on how brave a simple girl had become and supporting her in her endeavours.
MIRCH MASALA

Ketan Mehta’s *Mirch Masala* (1987) was a movie set during the pre-independence era of India where the local tax collector or *subedar* was flawlessly shown with all his evil power intact within.

The story depicts a typical low caste rural area where women have no say in the state of affairs and girls were not allowed to go to school with the boys otherwise “*Saare ladko me ek ladki, phir isse byah kaun karega?*” A mentality of uneducated and illiterate villagers were predominant in almost all the scenes in the movie.

The patriarchal society with its tentacles all around the place was shown from not only prohibiting girls to study but also from making their own decision to get married, or having a say in spending the night with other men. However, men used to consider it as an honour to have satisfied more than one woman even if his own wife is against it, a case with the village chieftain or *mukhiya* and his wife.

Though the *subedar* exploited his power in every possible way but still his male ego was not satiated until he got a girl of his choice, Sonbai, for him. Her intelligence, beauty, and confidence intrigued him which made her irresistible.

*Sonbai preparing food in her dilapidated house*

*Sонbai*, on the other hand is seen as a traditionally perfect wife who loved her husband and was emotionally dependent on him. She was not pleased at all when he decided to go to the city for a job. Though he was seen weaker than the *subedar* or the *mukhiya*, he did not want to stay in the same position for ever. He wanted a positive change in his life for the betterment of his family. It showed his futuristic
vision of contentment that could only be possible after leaving a place that was ruled
by the evilness of subedar and the injustice of the mukhiya.

Subedar was a man who could not settle for a ‘no’ for an answer and it was shocking
for him when his advances towards Sonbai was rejected with a tight slap on his face.
This hurt his fragile male ego and the only revenge he thought would be to disrobe
Sonbai of his honour which would be the ultimate humiliation she could suffer. And
this could also make him victorious in this play of power.

To make his power more prominent, Subedar artfully asked the villagers to give him
Sonbai as she had insulted him which has to be punished. He even tactfully
threatened them to expect dire consequences if his wishes are not met.

Here the selfishness and self-indulgence was highlighted at its best. All the villagers
were thinking about their own safety rather than the black hole in which they were
about to throw Sonbai. Not only did the villagers had this thought in her mind but all
the other women that were locked inside the chilli factory, where Sonbai took refuge,
were also forcing her to surrender otherwise they would face the same fate
afterwards.

The only few persons who were openly supporting Sonbai’s decision were the
school master, Mukhiya’s wife and brother, and the gate keeper of the factory, Abu
miyan. These few characters were shown to describe the fact that not all people are
similar but there are always a selected few who could bring about a change in the
society.

The scene where Subedar got the school master tied up to a log on which two more
were already tied up was an attempt to stop him from putting ideas into the mind of
the villagers. But when the school master tried to uproot the log with all his might, it
could be seen how his effort was an inspiration for the other two persons as well.
Together the three of them dislodged the log and went running towards the villagers
in an attempt to stop them. The scene may seem trivial but it had an impact in a way
that is showed how the strength of one person can be infectious if he was on the right
path. Though he could not be able to stop them still his effort was commendable.
Same was the case with Mukhiya’s wife who collected a group of village women but her battle was short lived as her husband and the husbands of all the other women manhandled them and forced them back into their homes.

While Mukhiya’s brother was also in favour of Sonbai’s decision of not giving into that pressure of Subedar, he did not make any kind of attempt to stop the villagers or mould their decisions in her favour. It seemed quite questionable as to why he did not try to make any attempt. Perhaps because he did not whole heartedly believe that Sonbai was correct or perhaps he had only expressed his views because he had promised his beloved who was also locked up inside the factory.

The strongest male character of the movie was shown through the depiction of the gate keeper of the factory, Abu miyan. He was determined to protect Sonbai till his last breath and that was exactly the case with him. When the Mukhiya came to the factory asking Abu miyan to open up the gates so that they could take Sonbai with them, he surprisingly commented, “Tajjub hai, saare gaaon me ek bhi marad nahi mila jo is aurat ki madad ko aaye... Marr jaunga lekin zulm me bhaagidari nahi karunga. Jao keh do us Subedar se ke gaaon me ek to mard maujud hai, jawan naa sahi budha sahi, jab tak who zinda hai zulm ki marzi nahi chalegi.” Faces of disappointed villagers could be seen as they knew they had been selfish but they were not admitting it outwardly.

Further when Mukhiya said that his decision was sheer madness, Abu miyan proudly said, “Agar aap log jo kar rahe hain wo samajhdari hai, to mujhe apna yeh pagalpan manzoor hai.” It shows that majority is not always right. What we see as
normal and acceptable could be unacceptable and abnormal from a different angle. For the villagers, their own safety was first but for Abu miyan all women had a right to make their own decisions and he respected the fact that Sonbai was not giving up herself to injustice.

Very conveniently Sonbai was told that the villagers would have convinced her husband to take her to the Subedar had he been in the village but Sonbai was determined not to kneel before the vicious game that Subedar was playing.

The end of the movie was a striking paradoxical to what was built up during the entire course of the movie. The women who were ready to give Sonbai up only for their own security gathered courage to fight the one person they started to loathe during this whole episode. They attacked the Subedar by throwing a handful of mirch masala (red chilli powder) onto him. His shrieks of pain and defeat was enough for the whole village to understand what a few women could do when angered.

NAMAK HALAAL

Prakash Mehra’s Namak Halaal (1982) came into the era of Amitabh Bachchan’s angry young man’s age but surprisingly it showed a different side of Bachchan with ease. The movie, as the name suggests, deals with the loyalty of a servant towards its master with a lot of twists and turns in the course of time. The movie was a blockbuster hit of its time, which was not uncommon to the Bachchan films at that time.

However, the movie revolved around the two male protagonists of the film, while the female protagonists were kept in the movie to provide some relief from the next dramatic episode of the movie and for having an excuse to include some song and dance sequences.

The character of Savitri was a loyal one who was not used to express her feelings to others. Hence, when his father-in-law blamed her for betraying his son and his master she was not able to defend herself rather thought it to be his duty to silently fulfil her dead husband’s promise of protecting their master’s son while deserting her own. This showed the highest level of loyalty of a woman who could left her own son only to take care of another one whom her husband had asked her to. This
loyalty was not only for her master but for her husband who is considered to be pati parmeshwar (husband – the god of a woman’s life) by traditional wives.

The initial minutes of the movie showed the first loyal (namak halaal) character of the story, which was Savitri. But unfortunately the director conveniently shifted the focus from her all too quickly to the other loyal servant, Arjun Singh, a character played by the superstar of the time – Amitabh Bachchan.

The movie had been telling the story through the eyes of Arjun and the female characters in the movie were not given more of a chance to show off their acting skills at all. Surprisingly, it was the time when Smita Patil was shining like a star in the Parallel cinema but in this Commercial movie she was not given her due share at all.

The song 'Aaj rapat jaaye' was the worst kind of humiliation for an actor like Patil. She was not even seen dancing properly with Bachchan rather she was been used as a prop and Bachchan was only tossing her like a doll.

Her character Poonam, though, was shown independent enough to earn money and make her own decisions still showed a true state where even an independent woman was afraid of stalkers and strange suitors, hence, that was the reason she told Arjun Singh, “Mera koi intezar kar raha hai” when he asked her to walk her home.

On the other hand there was another female character, Nisha. She was seen as a vulnerable person who was scared and traumatised by her past. She had absolutely no idea what her future might hold for her and had a very low self-esteem yet she put a faker mask of confidence and shrewdness to make Raja Kumar like her. She was
clever when it comes to her profession of cheating Raja but on a personal level she was a mere puppet in the hands of some male goons.

If compared these two female characters with one another, Poonam seemed to be more confident and smart than Nisha. Poonam had more brains and did what she want to do. She was the one who alerted Raja about the plans of Arjun. But Nisha was not allowed to even use her brains despite the fact that she had to entice Raja with her sexuality. She always did what she was told to do.

Hence, the movie being a blockbuster hit of its time had nothing to offer to its female audience. It was clearly made to entertain the male viewers by showing the macho men with the help of a few fight sequences and later on by saving the damsels in distress in the end.

Mandi

Shyam Benegal’s Mandi (1983) was a black comedy with some brilliant performers including Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Om Puri, Neena Gupta, Pankaj Kapoor, Amrish Puri, Soni Razdan, Saeed Jaffrey, and many more.

The movie depicts some light moments of laughter with its message well intact in the background. A realistic tale of a group of prostitutes in a brothel led by Rukmanibai and their struggle against some of the high classes that forced them to leave their place and make room for the so-called development in that area. The movie depicts the relationships of all the characters intertwined.
Benegal showed a very realistic picture of a brothel and its residents unlike a glamorous portrayal of it as shown in most of the Hindi movies. Here was an authentic representation of not only the brothel and the girls inside but also of the neighbourhood and its residents.

The most obvious and close relationship could be seen between Rukmanibai and Zeenat. Rukmanibai treated Zeenat as her daughter and always gave her special treatment from the rest of the girls. This angered some of the girls but nobody dared to ask the reason. Still when Zeenat was seen gaining some maturity and showed interest in leaving the brothel for good, Rukmanibai felt threatened and tried to coax her into discarding her plans.

The movie clearly showed the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society. It can be observed that brothels are made for the pleasure of males only. But only the females who work there are blamed and frowned upon. This thought was very well said by Rukmanibai in one of the scenes as “Mard khareeda hai tab hi to aurat bechti hai apne aap ko, aur kharaabi sirf aurat me dikhti hai mard me nahi.”

Bonding between Rukmanibai and Zeenat

A number of males were seen drooling over the girls of the brothel but when it comes to the disastrous situation of their displacement, no one came to the rescue. Apart from Dungrus, all the other males who entered the brothel had their lustful reasons behind them.

Then there was another female character, Shanti Devi, who was a social worker and was willing to throw those filthy women from anywhere near the city. Being a
woman also never helped her look into the hearts of those women who worked in a brothel for a reason. She gladly asked the girls inside the brothel to give up the lowly work they were doing to which one of them asked, “Arey to phir roti kahan se khayenge?” and Shanti Devi replied, “roti hi sab kuch nahi hai zindagi me” to which again the girls responded, “Mufat ki milte honge tereko.”

The fate of these women kept on dangling between these powerful people who just thought about their own good and development including the feminist social worker who could not relate to these hapless girls and their struggles.

The character of Rukmanibai was not like a master to her servants, rather she was a caretaker or a mother to all. She cared about all the girls as her own as she addressed them every now or then as ‘beti’. She was a strong woman who had control over all the lives living under the roof of her brothel.

Zeenat on the other hand was just like that parrot in the cage who was ignorant of the world outside it. She was always been kept under the safety and protection of Rukmanibai and knew nothing about other emotions when Susheel came along disclosing his love for her. She may be infatuated with him but she had experienced it for the first time and thought that this could be her chance to fly away from her cage. After knowing the truth about Susheel, she still fled with him only to leave behind all the filth she had been through all her life.

In a subtle way the movie projects how these people who were morally policing the entire city were themselves shallow and morally lacking people. And how those women who were considered filthy by everyone were the most realistic in nature without any pretentious acting like the others and were bound by morals.

**PREM ROG**

In 1982, Raj Kapoor produced a movie Prem Rog that dealt with the social evils persisting in our society regarding women. It mainly showed the double faced men residing around us and preaching about the injustice done to women.

Devdhar or Dev was a symbol of enlightenment as during his sojourn in the village he tried to make people have a broader look at life. It showed how education can change a mind-set.
Virendra Singh was seen as a hypocrite as he was against the remarriage of a widow but himself was engaged in an illicit relationship with a woman of lower caste. He proudly announced to her one day that “Samaaj ke banaye niyam aur kanoon ki raksha hum jaise zamindaar aur khandani log hi karte hain.”

The class difference was shown in a genuine way. The way higher classes treat the lower classes was shown in a realistic way. People with power and monetary strength always used it as a tool to humiliate those who are lower to them.

The helpless and dependent lower class woman is shown in the character of Radha. Her only reason to get married to a man double her age was to feel safe and secure. She was well aware of the fact that if she would not get married soon she would be used as the other lower caste girls of her age were being used for the pleasure of the high caste people.

The depiction of the uselessness of women is shown in one of the scenes where a married couple came to the Pujari asking about turning their bad luck into good fate for the husband. Pujari deviously told them that he could take some of the living years of the wife and add them to that of the husband’s to which both of them agreed but afterwards the husband came back to the Pujari asking him to give a little too many years of his wife’s to him because “Woh aurat zaat zyada din jee kar ke kya karegi.”

The dialogue vividly showed that selfishness can be found everywhere, even in a pious relationship that is between a husband and a wife. And one most important point that has been emphasised here was the fact that men think women are useless and their life is not much of a worth than that of the men. Once again degrading womenfolk in the eyes of the patriarchal community.

The director showed the misuse of religion in maintaining the superstitions of the uneducated villagers by the people who were said to be the care takers of religion. They are the persons responsible for lighting the flame of superstition in their minds and deviate those innocents to the wrong path.

Manorama or Rama was seen as an immature girl since the start of the movie and through the course of time her mental development could be gradually seen. Rama
had to learn the seriousness of the life in a very harsh way. Gradually she learnt about the ugly truths of the world and its people.

The oppression of women was shown since the start of the movie and throughout the movie it had been intended every now and then that women were inferior to men in every way. Rama’s sister in law had expressed her sorrow when she expressed that “Janam se yehi to sikhaya gaya hai ke pati parmeshwar hota hai, bhale wo aurat ko paaon ki jooti samjhe ya apni jayedad.” Showing the manner in which a woman is always subjugated in her own house.

The superficial rites and rituals of a so called reputed clan is portrayed throughout the movie. Even the eldest of that clan Bade Raja Thakur knew that what they were doing in the name of rituals were wrong but he kept his mouth shut to survive in the society where he had a name. He embarrassingly told Dev, “Hum log dohri zindagi jeete hain, dusron ke liye aur apne liye kuch aur.”

It was only Dev who could see the injustice prevailing around him and pointed out this hypocrisy of the patriarchal society when confronted his maternal uncle saying “Ye kaisi doghuli naitikta hai aap logo ki, mardon ke liye kuch aur, aurton ke liye kuch aur?”

Devdhar disclosed the hypocrisy of those rich and powerful people and said, “Betki izzat ki khatir tum nahi aaye ho yahan. Duniya ke samne apni jhooti shaan aur unchi naak banaye rakhne ke liye aaye ho. Jab saara gaao use vidhwa keh kar muh ghuma liya karta hai usme izzat nahi gayi tumhari, aur maine zara si izzat deni chaahi use to tumhari izzat kharab ho gai?”

He raised his voice against the inhuman treatment of Rama after widowhood and blamed him saying, “Ye ghair insani taur tareeke tmhare bade gharon se shuru hote hain aur phir reet riwaj aur niyam bann ke saare samaj me phail jaate hain.”

Though looking at the thematic sense, it is obvious that the movie deals with a subject that was completely women oriented. But still no woman is seen raising her voice against the injustice. It was only in the end when Chamiya snatched the mask off the face of Virendra Singh for being an honourable person that some woman was seen standing up against inhuman behaviour of women by the hands of men of high
class. But that dialogue was short lived as Virendra Singh shot her down just after that.

Nowhere in the movie was the character of any woman seen powerful or strong headed even when the film deals with a very serious subject of oppression of women. In such a movie we can see how males were fighting and how one of them, Dev, stood up in favour of those suppressed women whole heartedly, perhaps only because he had seen the life of one such woman very closely. Despite mocking the age-old traditions and customs on several occasions no woman ostensibly expressed the frustration or wrath of such customs in public.

**RAM LAKHAN**

Subhash Ghai’s blockbuster movie *Ram Lakhan* (1989) was about the story of two brothers and how they avenge their mother in their own ways. The movie had an ensemble cast that easily attracted the audiences into cinema halls. It was soon a blockbuster hit and made the male duo, Anil Kapoor and Jackie Shroff, sign several more films with each other.

The movie opened with a tragedy where a woman was thrown out by his brothers in law and she was left with her poverty and two young sons. Since the beginning of the movie, Sharda was seen as a dependent woman. She was initially dependent upon her husband and later on it was her sons on whom she depended.

Females in the movie was not given an equal status and it could be easily said by observing the introductory shots of each main character. Both the heroes of the
movie were introduced in a very dramatic way. They were seen from the back, then the eyes were shown, then the face, and then the whole body. Whereas, both the lead females were introduced in a simple way without any dramatic effect. It clearly showed that the filmmaker wanted to emphasise the importance of the male characters over the female ones.

Dependency of *Sharda* was seen throughout the movie. She even threatened her brothers in law by saying, “*Ram Lakhan ek zakhmi aurat ke do hathiyar hain.*” It showed that she had her sons as her protector and as a weapon against those evil brothers who had killed her husband. She was bringing up her sons in a way to take revenge from people against whom she felt herself weak and feeble.

One of the female leads, *Geeta*, was shown as an educated girl of a well off family. Still she was not given much of a screen space when compared to her male lead. Apart from shooting from a gun in the end there was no work in the movie that showed her strength or mental power.

The other female lead, *Radha*, was the most pathetic character in the movie. Her role was required only to add a comic or a romantic interlude in the movie. She was only used to sing and dance in the film. She was the most useless character shown in the movie. She was seen even more dependent than *Sharda* in the movie.

At first *Radha* was dependent on her father. She was not able to even look out the window without the permission of her father. And later on she was seen emotionally dependent on *Lakhan*. During the song ‘*Bada dukh deena tere Lakhan ne’* we could see that she was complaining about her beloved to his elder brother *Ram*, which again showed her dependency on *Ram* who was in a position to punish *Lakhan* because *Radha* was not in an equal status with *Lakhan* in that manner.
Moreover, before the song when Radha was performing at the mansion, it was emphasised that a few prostitutes had come to perform in a gathering of noble and honourable people. Clearly here the filmmaker wanted to emphatically display the degradation of females, including Radha, and on how embarrassed and ashamed she was feeling at that moment. A hypocritical patriarchal society is represented when no one even tried to interrupt Bhishambar Nath when he openly insulted the females present there to perform by calling them prostitutes which was obviously the lowest form of females referred to in the society.

It is, however, heart breaking to see that the profession of prostitute is considered to be degrading to females as this profession is alive only because of the satisfaction of the males in the society. It represents the double faced people who use females for their purpose and then announce them to be the filth of the society.

Thus, in every way the movie showed a heavily weak and fragile picture of females in the society and in the family as well, be it a lover, a wife, or a mother. The songs and scene that are remembered by the audience only involve the male protagonists of the film depicting that no scene held an impression of the female leads.

All these movies that were dealt in this chapter have different settings, be it domestic or official, and have different characters depicting various personal attributes, moral values, wearing different costumes. For instance, the movie Bazaar and Mandi might sound similar but they have a totally different outlook on life. Where one dealt with women as mere toys in the hands of the males of the society, the other showed how moral values are played by people who are said
to be respectable. Though both have a domestic setting but still they are different from one another because of the characters involved in them.

In *Arth* and *Namak Halal* women are shown both in a domestic as well as a professional setting. In a way the filmmakers wanted to show the confident and optimistic females who were independent and took decisions for themselves. But somehow the commercial movie depicted here lack the total freedom of a woman. Where *Arth* showed a woman and her transformation from being a timid person to a strong one after her husband left her, *Namak Halal* portrayed a woman who suffered sexual harassment but was too weak to protest against it and was finally saved by a man. Hence, the reaction of both the females may differ from one another as their characterisation was being penned in a particular way.

The dressing of a character also depicts a lot about the person. The movie *Prem Rog* made use of the dressing sense in this manner. *Rama* was shown as a careless person who always dressed neatly with fine jewellery. She was seen in a *lehenga* before she got married. Afterwards she wore heavy embroidered clothes to depict that she was married into a well off family. And when she became a widow she was seen dressed in white sarees with no jewellery and very less make up to show the desperate conditions she was living where she was not allowed to wear anything colourful.

Therefore, every movie showed various kinds of set ups and the characterisation of females in them were different according to the set ups. Though mostly in parallel movies the female characters were strong willed and confident than that of those shown in the commercial films.