Chapter III

Women and their Portrayal in Indian Cinema: Case Studies of Daman and Mrityudand
The Position of Women in India

There is a fundamental transformation in the position of women in modern India with the various reform movements and a gradual change in the perception of women in society. Clearly women have made great progresses towards equality in recent decades. Women have played a significant role in the social and political structure of India. The improving status of women in India started from the time of freedom movement in India. Independence brought the promise of equality of opportunity in all spheres of Indian women's lives. Laws granted equal rights of participation in the political process, equal opportunities and rights to education and employment and women in India came up in all spheres of life. They have gained social, political and economic rights. In this sense today many women are well educated and they are joining the universities and colleges in large numbers and they are entering into all kinds of professions like engineering, medicine, politics, teaching, etc (Kumar, 1994). They are emerging as educated, socially aware beings with a strong sense of their subjectivity. Thus, there is a major change in the lives of the women in the context of family matters, marriage, education, employment, their participation in social life.

Indian Cinema and the Emergence of Women Directors

India with its rich heritage through history and culture has been a remarkable country showing great advancement in the field of art. One of the most popular forms of art is Indian drama and cinema. Indian film industry, especially Hindi cinema is the largest film industry in the world with the most prolific rate of production – a staggering 800 plus films a year – screened for approximately fifteen million people a day. Feature films are produced in approximately 20 languages in India and there are multiple film industries whose total output makes India the largest feature film-producing country in the world (Virdi, 2003). It is the dominant cultural institution and product in India, providing affordable entertainment to audiences drawn primarily (though not exclusively) from the working class in urban centers. However, Hindi films, though comprising approximately 20 percent of total production, are the ones that circulate nationally and internationally, dominate the discourse about Indian cinema, and are regarded as the standard or archetype to follow or oppose. Even as a British colony, India was the third largest producer of films in the world. World War II and independence from Britain in 1947 ushered in social, economic, and political changes.
that also changed the nature of filmmaking. The antecedents for the contemporary Bombay film industry emerge from this era. As Virdi puts it, the industry of Indian cinema both reflects and is reflected through the country's political, economic, social and cultural aspects.

According to Stafford (2006) for better understanding of Indian cinema we have to look at its four categories, namely, Popular Hindi Cinema, Regional cinema, ‘Ar’ or ‘specialized’ cinema and Diaspora cinema (films made by Indian filmmakers based overseas). We can best understand the importance of these classifications by making two simple distinctions. The first is between ‘popular’ and ‘art’ cinema.

The massive popular audiences in India which includes a significant proportion of people with limited access to education enjoy universal genres such as action, comedy and melodrama and more specifically ‘Indian’ stories with spiritual/mythological themes. Commercial Indian cinema is the most powerful medium of communication in Indian society. The pleasures the commercial film offers, and the desires it creates, make it a vital part of popular culture and a critical site of cultural interpretation. However, one thing notable about the popular cinema was that despite its permeating Indian culture, Hindi cinema’s stylistic conventions were paradoxically in complete disjunction from everyday reality.

Nevertheless, beside the audience for commercial cinema there is also an Indian audience for more ‘serious’ film narratives as artistic cinema. It is interesting to mention that the techniques of popular cinema have largely been shaped by traditional narrative, whereas those of artistic cinema have been western in nature, largely neo-realistic. And yet, the artistic films are much closer to Indian reality than the popular films which are mostly fantasies. Topics such as ‘self and modernization, alienation, clash of tradition and modernity and the ensuing confusion of values, westernization and its impact, the role of the artist in a consumer society, the subjection of women are the central issues for a deep understanding of artistic Indian cinema (Gokulsing, 1998).

For many years from the 1950s to the 1980s, it was the Bengali art film director Satyajit Ray who represented Indian Cinema to the outside world. In the 1970s Indian Cinema developed a more socially aware and more politically orientated form of cinema, partly subsidised by public funding, which was known as Parallel
Cinema – running alongside but clearly distinguished from mainstream cinema. Slowly, the art cinema of the 1980s diversified from its Bengali moorings of the earlier period under the aegis of the Film Finance Corporation. Works by Shyam Benegal, Gautam Ghose, Saeed Mirza, BV Karanth, Girish Kasaravalli, Mrinal Sen, MS Sathyu, Ray, and Kundan Shah, among others, actively addressed questions of social injustice: problems of landlord exploitation, bonded labor, untouchability, urban power, corruption and criminal extortion, the oppression of women, and political manipulation. Directors like Ritwik Ghatak in particular had addressed many of these issues earlier, but never had there been such an outpouring of the social conscience, or such a flowing of new images – of regional landscapes, cultures, and social structures. Shyam Benegal's first two films indicated a concern with the psychology of domination and subordination. *Ankur* (The Seedling, 1974) is particularly striking not only for this but also for the open, fluid way it captures the countryside. Kasaravalli, a Kannada director working in south India, in *Ghattashradha* (1981) presented an intimate vision of the oppression of widows through the view of a child. Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* (Let it be, 1984), was a wonderful exercise in farce and slapstick that is also a brilliant portrait of Bombay.

The second distinction, sometimes overlapping with the first, can be seen between home-made films and those made by Indians (and sometimes even non-Indians) abroad. One can identify a new context for Indian cinema in the 1990s, one which contrasts sharply to its official status during the decades after independence. In the 1950s, the cinema in its dominant, commercial format was understood by the state to be a form that did not warrant sympathetic policies, was to be taxed and regulated in order to control its dubious attractions for a mass audience. Then the situation changed substantially. One of the major developments was the emergence of a significant market, getting high returns in Indian cinema’s export oriented sector. Since the 1990s and the opening up of the Indian market to private investors at home and overseas, this political cinema has gone into decline, but to some extent the tradition of ‘socially aware’ films has been supported by Indian filmmakers such as Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta who have returned to India to make films using their training and experience gained in North America (respectively the US and Canada). This ‘Diaspora Cinema’ often, but not always, means art cinema.
An important fact is that in the 1920s-30s, there were women actors who made their mark in the Hindi film industry assertively. Devika Rani is considered the first lady of Indian Cinema. She, along with her producer-cum-actor husband, Himashu Rai, churned memorable films like *Karm* and *Savitri*. Others in the league were Shobhna Samarth, Noorjehan, Khursheed and Suraiya all of whom are legends in their own right and helped in shaping the Indian Cinema. In the mainstream Hindi cinema the female protagonist roles have projected various stereotypes of woman – the pure virgin, the loyal and obedient wife, the mother and the *Pakeezah* prostitute. Due to the cinematic representation of women as stereotypical characters, Indian cinema also has emphasized on women centric films. Women's image, status and role as a social issue in society are reflected in cinema in India and have been present in even in popular Indian cinema almost right from the start. As early as 1924, Chandulal Shah, a film producer made the first film called *Gun Sundari* with the women's questions (Barnow and Krishnaswamy, 1980). This was considered a milestone in the rise of the Indian 'social' film.

Nevertheless, in spite of increased visibility, Indian women have not in general been autonomous and self defined in the films. This is not surprising given that 90 per cent of the directors and producers are men. It is not an oversimplification to say that in popular Indian cinema women are seen very much in bad or good roles. It has been pointed out that in spite of some apparent concern with 'women's issues' the commercial Indian film constantly projects the woman as a sex object on the one hand, and as an unequal partner on the other. In fact according to Butalia (1984) there is perhaps one film in every 100 that attempts to look at a woman as a human being in her own right.

Despite the limited number of women filmmakers, it cannot be denied that even if they were only a handful, these women made their presence felt in cinematic circles. Madhava Prasad (in Nelmes, 2003) notes that a fully independent woman's film struggled to develop in the 1960s, all too often annexed to what he sees as the super genre or the feudal family romance. But as the women's movement gained strength in India and highlighted women's oppression and a struggle for an egalitarian society, a series of women filmmakers brought women from the margins to the centre of their text and focused on female subjectivity (Datta, 2000). Emergence of films which depict social and political anxieties, the woman's film genre which includes
women centered narratives, portrayal of female protagonists undergoing political conversion towards feminist politics has been the response to the concerns of feminists both in India and Diasporas. Till some years back the number of women filmmakers in India which churn out more films than any other country could be counted on the fingers of hand. The numbers are now rising. There are a lot of women making a name for them in the world.

There are presently a great diversity of filmmakers than ever before, giving voice to new perspectives and tales. This has certainly been the case with the many women directors, who bring their own distinct and sometimes radically unconventional visions and narrative techniques to the cinematic world. Various films have been made by women filmmakers featuring the depiction of the female protagonist and challenging in context of her sexual identity such as Aparna Sen, Sai Paranjpye, Kalpana Lajmi and Aruna Raje which has represented portrayal of women protagonists' realm of social and sexual identity in specific socio historical context. They have exposed some of the tensions and contradictory pressures connected with the representation of female subjectivity in the context of family in Indian cinema.

Women directors have shown that cinema in years ahead will provide more defined contours to the cause of women empowerment. However women's groups are now attempting to collect information about the hidden women in commercial and new cinema. The present opportunities should be utilized by women directors to portray their representations of women to the screen. Even English films in India have also come up with the problems that women face. These include domestic violence, stifled aspirations, loneliness, widowhood and others. Fire, Provoked, Water and other films have addressed different women centric problems. Today the filmmakers are producing such movies which are looking more at women's issues and avoiding some of the stereotypes which have existed earlier and they have helped the emergence of women's freedom.

Representation of Women on Screen in India

After a brief examination of the background of Indian cinema let us consider the representation of women and women's cinema as an important part of cinema in Indian society. The representation of women in cinema has been a major issue of debate amongst feminist film theorists in India. The complex and fascinating
relationship between women and cinema has a substantial literature and some interesting work on third world feminism, which illuminates aspects of the representation of women in Indian films. The representation of women and the representation by women on screen are essential for understanding the interplay between women and cinema in India (Gokulsing, 1998). In traditional Indian society, the lives of women were severely circumscribed and there were certain prescribed roles which regulated the conduct of women. Women in India, defined by a set of relationships and models of conduct within the framework of a created society, over the years, learned to live under the twin whips of heritage and modernity (Bhattacharya, 2005).

When we look at the representation of women in Indian cinema we find that in the 1950s and 60s, Indian Cinema experienced one of its most illustrious times. Films were made to please the masses. During those times, many female actors showed their prowess as stars and actresses of immense talent. Exploring a background of women's role in Indian films, Dissanayake (1998) mentioned that four typical women's roles are reflected in a great deal of popular Indian Cinema. These important roles include the ideal wife, ideal mother, the vamp, and the courtesan. The first character is 'Ideal Wife' which is represented by sexual purity and fidelity. She must be consistent with traditional Indian roles by honoring the family and depending on the husband. The 'Ideal Mother' as second character involves religious suggestion. The country is connected with the mother goddess, Shakti, who represents great strength. The role of the mother in Indian film is often seen as a strong force, such as in Mother India (1957). The third character is 'Vamp' who is usually ‘modern’ and imitates western women in Indian film. Her behavior can include smoking, drinking, and dancing. She can also be quick to fall in and out of love. She represents unacceptable behavior and is seen as unwholesome. She is almost always punished for her behavior. And the last one is the 'Courtesan'. The courtesan is outside the normal realm of Indian womanhood in that she is a type of prostitute or dancing girl. She embodies sexuality. She is a character who helps with the physical and emotional needs of men. Often in Indian film, she gives the man comfort and care, after which, he leaves her to desperately mourn his loss.

The important fact is that mostly the images of women in cinema were an object of male desire and potential possessions, which had to be protected by the strength of male (Jain and Rai, 2002). In traditional Indian society, the lives of women
were greatly restricted. Strict rules and regulations had to be followed. Women’s roles in films too were essentially those of daughter (Beti), wife (Patni) and mother (Ma). They had a profound effect on shaping the morals of Indian society and it was believed that a female should be subject in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband and when her husband is dead, to her children (Gokulsing, 1998). For example, the concept of woman as Sita was prevalent in Indian society, as well as, Indian films. Over the years Indian popular cinema had perpetuated this ideal of a wife’s selfless devotion. Women were defined not only in relation to the man but also as dependent on the man and subordinate to the man (Majumdar, 2009). In most cases women’s presence in a film started with their characters’ introduction as the hero’s love interest, then as emotional accomplices midway into the film and just for a hug at the end of the film. Women had nothing much to contribute to the film. In this sense Indian cinema has usually misrepresented women and imaged them in stereotypical terms.

Most of the films displayed women as subordinate characters, often viewed as objects of desire, through the objectification of female body and the repression of female identity. The woman becomes an object and not the subject. Heroines were just centerpieces and had common dialogues like, ‘Bachao, Bachao’ (help help!), ‘Kaminey, Chod De Mujhe (Rascal, let go of me), etc. In movies like Balwan, Mohra, Tezaab, Parinda, Beta, Phool Aur Kaante, Parampara, Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman, Baazigar, etc. the actress used to be the point of attraction for the heroes. The wardrobe exhibition which the heroines took towards the end of the 20th century made them more prone to being just glamour dolls (Bhattacharjee, 2007). Among these stereotypes and demonization, the real Indian woman was often lost or ignored.

The new Indian cinema has attempted, to some extent, to rectify this lapse by looking at women’s issues more seriously and by attempting to avoid some of the stereotypes. There was an increase in the numbers of women centric films, as male producers and directors show at least a superficial concern with ‘women's issues’. The post-emergency period witnessed the production of a number of films dealing with women's issues, particularly by those who came under the category of the 'New Wave' directors (Mazumdar, 2007). The new cinema movement of the 70's and 80's made attempts to explore women's subjectivity, her familial and civic role. In the artistic cinema, directors associated with New Cinema represent a very different image of
women. They have showed women as products of diverse social formations and seeking to transcend their sordid circumstances, not as objects of male desire (Gokulsing, 1998). Female characters were now being developed with the fullness that male characters always had. They were portrayed in a much more mature and realistic manner than in the past. Women centric films were being penned by many innovative scriptwriters and film producers who gave a unique importance to women in Hindi cinema.

The trend continued and in the past few years some Indian films have sought to present a more realistic view of the Indian woman. Some of these films have actually represented women in a radical mode and even explored the question of female sexuality (Bharucha, 1995). Indian cinema has changed across the ages and women are identified as the harbingers of change. In the new cinema women are symbolic of the rage against the oppressiveness of patriarchy. The women once caught between the conflicting interests of passive femininity and regressive masculinity strive to achieve a stable sexual identity.

Contemporary socially relevant films like Madhur Bhandarkar's Page Three, Revathi's Phir Milenge (We Will Meet Again), Mahesh Manjrekar's Astitva (Identity), Prakash Jha's Mrityudand (Death Penalty), Kalpana Lajmi's Daman (Domination), etc, portray women who strive to make a mark of their own in the domestic sphere as well as the public sphere. They no longer subscribe themselves to the harsh and oppressive patriarchal truths.

After the introduction of the role of women in Indian cinema it is important to mention that the aim of this chapter will be to analyze some important points regarding the women's portrayal in two selected Hindi movies. Accordingly, in the following section we will have a look at the cinematic work of the two directors – Kalpana Lajmi and Prakash Jha with special attention to their selected films (Daman and Mrityudand).

**Indian Films under Study: Daman and Mrityudand**

**Daman directed by Kalpana Lajmi**

Kalpana Lajmi was born in 1954 and is a renowned Indian film director, producer and script writer. Lajmi is an independent filmmaker working more on realistic, low
budget films, which are known in India as parallel cinema. Her films are often woman-oriented films. Kalpana Lajmi debuted as an assistant director assisting the veteran film director Shyam Benegal. She later went on to work as an assistant costume designer with Shyam Benegal's *Bhumika* (The Role, 1979).

She debuted as a director with a documentary film. The film *D.G. Movie Pioneer* in 1978 went well with audiences and she moved on to direct more documentaries like *A Work Study in Tea Plucking* (1979) and *Along the Brahmaputra* (1981). She debuted as a feature film director in 1986 with *Ek Pal* (One Minute). She produced the film, wrote the story and the screenplay for the film along with Gulzar. Lajmi was appreciated for her Hindi directorial debut. She then took a break from directing movies and went to direct her first television serial *Lohit Kinare* (1988). She made her comeback to cinema in 1993 with the critically acclaimed *Rudaali* (The Mourner) whose star Dimple Kapadia won the National Film Award for Best Actress for her performance and Lajmi also won accolades for directing the film. Her next film was *Darmiyana* (In Between, 1997) which was directed and produced by her. Her next film in 2001 was *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence*. The film was distributed by the Indian Government and was highly acclaimed by critics. It was the second time that an actress (Raveena Tandon) won the National Film Award for Best Actress under Lajmi's directorial hand. Lajmi was credited as being the one to exploit the hidden talent in her actors. Her next film *Kyon?* (Why, 2003) went unnoticed. Her last film to hit screens was *Chingaari* (Spark) in 2006 which turned out to be a commercial box-office flop although it was acclaimed for its performances.

Kalpana Lajmi is one of the few female directors whose films have a touch of feminism and who has made film the medium through which women's suppressed longings could be brought to the fore. She tries to be different, tries to make films with strong female protagonists or on issues concerned with women. Lajmi as a famous filmmaker has promoted various women-centric issues in her films including the conveying the trauma of a victim of marital rape. Without drifting into women's lib, she has compellingly portrayed what happens to women who keep silent in the face of male subjugation.

In this respect Kalpana Lajmi transcends the conventional cinematic boundaries and depicts women’s sexuality as being free of guilt. In *Ek Pal* (1986), the protagonist has a sexual fling in the absence of her husband. Breaking the conventions
of Indian society, she conceives, decides to keep the child and willingly reveals the identity of the child’s father to her husband. In *Darmiyaan* (1997), Lajmi critiques the marginalization of the third sex, hermaphrodites, who in India are commonly known as eunuchs or *hijras*. In this film, Lajmi creates irony around the use of female sensuality in popular Hindi cinema’s melodramatic genre. Lajmi’s latest film, *Chingari* (2006), questions the patriarchal traditions, Hindu religion and the tortured state of womanhood in north Indian society. Lajmi censures the three stereotypical images of goddess, mother, and prostitutes in Indian society.

Among all of Lajmi’s cinematic works, it is in *Daman* (2001) that she questions marital rape, an undiscussed topic in Indian society and Indian films. *Daman*, meaning dominance, is by no means a run of the mill Hindi film. It dares to tackle the hard-hitting subject matter of domestic violence and marital rape.

**Plot Outline of Daman**

*Daman* tells the story of a young woman who is subjected to years of physical and psychological torture at the hands of her husband. Durga is a low caste girl married off to a sadist husband Sanjay Saikia who is a wealthy tea plantation owner. Sanjay Saikia is a pervert and there is nothing decent about him. He is shown as a very one-dimensional person whose only motive in life seems to make everyone's life miserable. From the first day he does everything to humiliate and degrade his wife and while she pines for him he is busy having a good time with another woman. All attempts of Durga to be nice and pleasant to her husband are met with sneers and violence. His idea of showing his love to his wife is scorching her with hot candle wax, disfiguring her face with lipstick and remorselessly raping her. In that mad house the only source of comfort for Durga is her brother-in-law, Sunil who unlike his elder brother, is gentle and cultured and the only one who seems to understand Durga. Yet he cannot do much for her. A silent relationship does build up between Durga and Sunil, but there are no signs of physical proximity between the two. Kalpana Lajmi has very tenderly shown their relationship where there are repressed passions but nothing beyond that.

When Durga gives birth to a baby girl, Sanjay refuses to acknowledge her as his daughter. He had wanted a boy, another social issue sandwiched in between by the director. With Sunil's unspoken support and for the sake of her daughter, Durga is
willing to endure all the pain and the humiliation. However, things continue like that until Sanjay in a fit of temper decides to marry off his 14-year-old daughter. Sunil protests and in turn is brutally murdered by his brother who throws him in the gushing river. Durga is completely shattered with this incident and manages to run away with her daughter to Gauhati where an elderly woman gives her and her daughter shelter. Time passes by, but Sanjay soon finds them both and when he tries to lure the daughter back to him by bequeathing all his property to her, she refuses. Furious at being refused and rejected he tries to kill his daughter, but Durga emerges as a raging lioness and the immense strength of Goddess Durga helps her keep the resolve of not allowing her daughter to suffer the same fate as her (Vashisht, 2001).

_Daman_ depicts women’s suffering due to male subjugation and domination. It is a film that highlights the important problem of domestic violence which is a stigma on any society. The film focuses on the dark side of the institution of marriage and conveys the trauma of a victim of marital rape. It brings to light the oppressive conditions of a married woman’s life in an arranged marriage. The film portrays how a woman can be physically and emotionally exploited by her husband and shows violence as an indicator of social structure while also offering women’s agency as a response to domination. As the film shows, the protagonist despite her subjugation has certain strength to rise above her situation, revolt against her husband and finally get out of a helpless situation even if it means killing him. The film indicates the essential point that women should be able to stand up against domination and fight for their rights (Khan, 2004).

_Mrityudand directed by Prakash Jha_

Prakash Jha (born in 1952) is an Indian film producer-director who is most known for his political and socio-political films. Jha, an independent filmmaker has produced and directed nine feature films, over 25 documentaries, two television features and three television series. He is a multiple award winning filmmaker known nationally and internationally for his critically acclaimed and popular films including _Damul_ (Underneath, 1984), _Mrityudand_ (Death Penalty, 1997), _Gangaajal_ (Holy Water, 2003), _Apaharan_ (Kidnap, 2005) and multi-starrer hit movie _Rajneeti_ (Politics, 2010). He is also the maker of National Film Award winning documentaries like, _Face after Storm_ (1984) and _Sonal_ (2002). He has also made some lighter films like _Dil Kya
Prakash Jha has won eight national awards including the National Award for the Best Feature Film on Social Issues. Among his cinematic works one movie (*Mrityudand*) has been selected for this study which was invited to several festivals like London, Dublin, Bangkok, New York Human Right Festival, Cinema Tout Ecran (Geneva) etc. It also has received international awards for best feature film.

**Plot Outline of Mrityudand**

*Mrityudand* (Death penalty) is a Hindi film released in 1997. It was directed and produced by Prakash Jha. *Mrityudand* is a Bihari story of three village women revolting against their husbands and ultimately rushing to their doom. The plot revolves around three women, Ketki, Chandravati and Kanti. Ketki and Chandravati are sister-in-laws while Kanti is a servant. Tirpat Singh, a contractor, gets involved with Ketki’s husband Vinay and soon, murders him due to some complications. Ketki witnesses Kanti being exploited by Tirpat. Chandravati, who is neglected by her husband Abhay Singh falls in love with Ram Baran (Om Puri), a Dalit and becomes pregnant. The film shows three women, who have gone through a lot of ordeal in their lives, deciding to rebel against the society. The villagers severely punish their rebellious behavior. They get the ultimate punishment. They get death sentence.

The film is set in the fictional village of Bilaspur, Bihar in 1996. The movie starts with the grisly portrayal of a mob killing of two defenseless women, orchestrated by vested interests, and how village power players later evade administrative inquiries into this atrocity. This incident sets the tone for much of the rest of the movie. It is a film which subtly weaves several sub-plots into itself. The underlying story of the film is about Ketki who gets married to the younger son Vinay of landlord who fortunes have been consumed and who now lives on past glory.

This movie tells the story of a family beset by financial troubles brought on, in part, by the machinations of a corrupt politician and a vicious, thieving businessman. They are quickly plunged into the midst of machinations by several powerful and unscrupulous villagers. Foremost among them is contractor Tirpat, a powerful, corrupt and ruthless man who oppresses poor people and especially women with impunity. Vinay too becomes influenced by Tirpat, and under this influence spirals down a dark road of domestic abuse, alcoholism, and selfishness that alienates his
loving wife and tears apart the whole family, despite her best efforts to fight this. The village is ruled by the contractor and broker Tripat, aided by the local politician Pandey. Rambaran (Om Puri) is a lower caste merchant who has been giving loans to the landlord's family. When the businessman – Tirpat, the film's unequivocal bad guy – schemes to murder the local pandit, the new owner of a valuable quarry, namely, Chandravati’s husband Abhay Singh takes the pandit's place. This leaves his younger brother Vinay, a newly-married aspiring contractor, in charge of the property and ripe for manipulation. Tirpat's schemes bring ruin to Vinay and threaten his blissful marriage to Ketki.

Apart from portraying the internal politics of caste and economics running in the village which has one foot in the past and one foot in the present, this film discusses emotional and physical violence against women. The eldest sister-in-law Chandravati is the long suffering wife of Abhay Singh the eldest son of the family. For 17 years of their marital life she has been emotionally and physically abused by Abhay, who loses no opportunity to remind her of being a banjh (sterile woman). To escape the drudgery at home and to regain clout, Abhay Singh murders the temple head, the pandit and gets himself ordained as his successor. The result is that he gives up all worldly pleasures and leaves his wife. After a life-threatening illness, she finds comfort in the arms of a family friend, the low caste Rambaran.

As Vinay struggles to keep the household going, Ketki aides him to start off his own entrepreneurial venture as a contractor, but soon Vinay becomes a pawn in the hands of Tripat and Pandey. It is the beginning of the end for him as he starts physically and emotionally abusing Ketki. In the meantime, Rambaran talks sense to Vinay and makes him see the fact that he is being taken for a ride. Rambaran's daily visits to Chandravati brings them closer and, as their relationship turns sexual, Chandravati discovers she is not sterile. Vinay in the meanwhile has taken care of things at home and got back at Tripat. Even Ketki comes back to him, but Tripat has Vinay killed to regain his power.

Meanwhile, Ketki's maid Kanti faces travails of her own. She is forced to give herself to Tirpat's men to repay her husband's debts to him. However, inspired by Ketki, the sisters-in-law and an army of other women terrorized by Tirpat and his cronies stand up and fight against the subjugation they have endured. The rest of the movie deals with their efforts to break out of this morass, both within their
relationship as well as outside of it, and Vinay's and especially Ketki's long, hard, and bloody struggle to confront and defeat the forces of oppression and male domination in the village. The film ends with a melodramatic showdown, a literal battle of the sexes, which leaves no doubt that justice has been done, though with a price.

*Mrityudand* is a film that straddles the art-house and mainstream filmy universes. It is used as a microcosm of the decadent landlord culture. The landlords are just coming to terms with the new class politics that through the reservation policy puts them at an advantage. It is the story of class conflict immersed in the economic power games being played by power brokers and middlemen at the grassroots level. Additionally, the film is a commentary on social and gender injustice and social problems. *Mrityudand* is a film that attacks the very concept of male dominance in a relationship and in the society. The film states that it's the man's virility and animal strength that makes him attack a woman, but affirms that what is more important is the upbringing of the man. Prakash Jha's *Mrityudand* witnessed a new face of the educated Indian women, willing to rebel and fight for her rights.

**Portrayal of Women in the Films through Structure and Agency**

After looking at the general plots of the films *Daman* and *Mrityudand*, in the following section we examine the twin processes of Indian women being constrained by social structure and women having agency in representation in cinema. We will see how gender is organized by culture and interrelated within larger social relations; how Indian culture and tradition affect women and their status in society; what is the level of women's agency and submissiveness through their interaction's patterns; how cultural beliefs and interactional patterns have formed women's representation in cinema; and what kind of characters are represented in the selected films specifically in the area of power and autonomy of women. The important point is how cinema reflects those mentioned facts and shows woman as a victim or as an agent. As was the case with the Iranian films, the subjects of patriarchy, caste, gender stereotyping and violence are taken under social structure while empowerment, decision making, education, rebellion, participation are the themes related to agency.

**Themes of Social Structure**

India is a country with diverse cultures. Customs and traditions vary from region to region. Yet, of course, some commonality does exist in the social structure, which is a
unifying force. The Indian social structure is closely linked to the traditional beliefs of the Indians. Tradition in India is about values that transcend down generations automatically. Ancient culture believed in a lot of dogmas and rituals that can be termed as false beliefs and Indians are an intelligent lot to traverse these paths and modify the social requirements. It is a unique blend of diverse religions, cultures and racial groups. Let us consider the various social formations that provide the unifying force as well as distinct characteristics to the Indian society. The most important elements of Indian social structure would be patriarchy, gender stereotyping, caste system and violence.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a term used to describe the oppressive and exploitative relations experienced by women as a result of privileging male power in society. This is enforced by restricting women’s autonomy especially their sexual autonomy and justifying violence against women as natural and limiting women’s realm for making decisions about their own lives. Women who step outside social norms of femininity can face severe retribution. Such patriarchal power relations result in the systematic abuse of women’s human rights.

India is a patriarchal society, with the males having control over the family unit. This concept exists predominantly in Indian and in many cultures within the country. India has always comprised of different cultures which consist of family units that consider the oldest male to be the supreme head of the family, and this person takes over all the decision making of the family unit in the household. It may, however, be mentioned that although patriarchy is pervasive in India but varies in degree depending on region, community, class, caste, and religious or social group. Religious patriarchy works as a vehicle for coercing women to accept gender oppression through religion, in order to maintain the cohesion of the male-dominated social system in India. We can say that women in India experience violence, subordination and disadvantage within patriarchy.

For Indian films patriarchal values form an important area of depiction. Almost every Indian film will have this theme of patriarchy running through its main story. Many films have been made and continue to endure that are a good reflection of society and the aspirations and values and mindset of the common people. Generally
these themes relate to religious values, family values and of course, patriarchal values. Most of such films generally incorporate these dimensions in their story and role characterization. The nature of patriarchy varies according to the issues of the household and family unit. It could be a patriarchy of the village elders, it could be the patriarchy of the family head or it could even be the male chauvinism that is shown in the various films in scenes relating to public institutions. In relation to family system, generally films depict a joint family milieu.

Usually Indian cinema tends to reproduce patriarchal ideology which is in itself a stereotype. The great danger with such a process is that it gives no space for female agency and turns female spectatorship itself to a helpless victimized viewing position where a woman cannot assert her desire beyond the patriarchy defined boundary of the one man who contains it. However, there have been some films that have focused on both structure and agency of women. Consequently, let us first explore how a patriarchal ideology is upheld and reinforced through male-governed social and legal institutions and in the later section how women defy that control.

Films show female subordination in patriarchal ideological systems. In Daman Durga, the female protagonist lives with her in-laws in a patriarchal family. The message in her family is clear. Women don't have the right to their own status and should obey whatever men ask them to do. For example in the film when Durga has been raped by her husband, the police officer goes to her place to investigate the situation. The police officer tells her mother-in-law "You are more worried about you being maligned in the society. Won't you like to know that what that man did? He raped her so violently. Remember that a rapist not only harms his prey physically and mentally but he also rapes her self-respect. It is possible that this incident can ruin your daughter-in-law's life forever". Her mother-in-law tells the policeman "If this matter is leaked out then it will become a matter of discussion for everyone. We will be humiliated in our entire family and society". The implication here is clear that the honor of the family is above the preservation of the rights of the women in the family. This also shows women's oppression under patriarchy, where women don't have any protection against violence.

The patriarchal practice of desiring a son is also part of the Indian culture which is depicted in Daman. When Durga gives birth to a daughter her husband says "You have given birth to a girl; that can't be possible. I will have a son. Then I will
name the child. Don’t give her my name”. The low esteem in which a girl child and her mother are held is shown quite clearly in this scene. In another scene the husband says to the policeman “Arguments usually take place between a husband and his wife. Has she ever accused me of anything? No, she has not. And she will not even do it. Because the Indian men think that they have complete right to rule over their wives. And women also believe that they have to tolerate the atrocities of their husbands.”

Another thing portrayed in the film is that women cannot go out of house or meet their friends or family without the permission of their husbands. Durga's husband tells her "I heard you want to meet your childhood friend. Did you take anyone's permission? Are you dumb? My wife spends the whole evening talking about someone else's husband. But she was ashamed to mention anything about her own husband".

In the second film Mrityudand, patriarchy is depicted in all its forms – village patriarchy, family patriarchy, religious patriarchy, male chauvinism. In the form of village patriarchy, it has been shown that women can be subjugated by the patriarchal system. For example, it is the men in the village community who decide the punishment of women who err. As Ketki's brother-in-law says to the other men "The women were running a whore house in the town. Vinay was killed by Ketki's pimps. Their sins are revealed. Justice will be yours. Come to your senses. On your feet now. Else our women will laugh at our impotence. No one will ever give his daughter to any man in this village". In another scene, when a woman goes to talk to the contractor for getting her wage, he does not want to listen to her and tells her "Enjoy the display of my power. You seem to speak well. But your sermons will not work here. Now get out of here before I lose my temper”.

Patriarchy is shown to exist in the family as well. It is represented by a family structure where all the decision making powers are in the hands of the male members. When Ketki stands up against her brother-in-law to get her right, he tells her "Don't think too much of yourself. This is going to cost you dearly". Another time he highlights the feeling of inferiority that women feel. He says to her "Can you protect yourself even for a day?" And pointing out the women are not intelligent he also adds "I agree with the saying that even the creator can't change a women's way of thinking".
In this film there is depiction of religious patriarchy as well. This notion of patriarchy is portrayed in the very first scene where the temple priest is talking to another man about two women – a mother and her daughter who has become pregnant after an affair with someone – who have fled the village to escape from being lynched by the villagers. "They were women of loose character. Ganga, a 22 year old widow and her mother must be hounded out of the village. Ganga was mentally unstable. That’s why I forbade her from entering the temple. She had even become pregnant. Such a shame".

Male chauvinism is also portrayed as a form of patriarchy. There is a scene which shows Ketki’s husband feeling offended when she tries to give him some advice. He tells his wife “You are my wife. Don’t try to become my husband. Don’t forget who the husband is. No matter what you are, don’t you ever forget who I am”. This statement coming from a fairly liberal man clearly reveals how deep the roots of patriarchy have gone. Even the women cannot escape this ideology. Once when Ketki asks her sister-in-law “Why must women always suffer?” The answer is simple but telling “That’s the rule”, indicating that women cannot challenge men’s power. In the film one woman says to another "No one can change the destiny. Have patience. You have to take life as it comes. Because he is a man and he has the right to do anything". Or that "Men will always be like that. It is better to obey them". Thus, in both films the ideology of patriarchy is quite clearly depicted privileging male power both in the public and private spheres.

**Gender Stereotyping**

Stereotypes of South Asians have over the years been collectively internalized by western societies, and are manifested by the society’s media, literature, theatre and other creative expressions. Amongst these the form that has the maximum impact is the visual medium of films. However, these stereotypes have very real repercussions in terms of perception of the masses and culture of the different countries (Tudor and Buscombe, 1986). Most films depict these stereotypes.

Indian cinema offers us the desexualized moral images of Indian women – the self-sacrificing mother who also symbolize India’s idealism, the ideal obedient and respectful wife who saves the family and husband from all evils and the dutiful daughter and the loyal sister. Popular cinema reproduces social roles that define
private familial spaces for women (Gokulsing, 1998). These roles have historical depth in Indian mythological and religious texts, such as Vedas, Manusmriti, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. Sita, Sati and Savitri are the mythological burdens on Indian womanhood reproduced by popular cinema.

In patriarchal societies such as India women always are submissive and men are dominant emphasizing the superiority of men and inferiority of women. There is a phrase in Daman which explains this reality very well. Durga’s husband tells his wife that "A wife makes the food hot. A mistress makes the bed feel hot. You should fulfill your duties of a wife. You are a devoted wife. Remove my shoes. You dress up too much. You are my wife not a mistress", thus, outlining the stereotype of the dutiful wife implying that a good woman is one who always satisfies her husband's needs. Similarly, a good woman is one who obeys her husband and is not permitted to make her own life choices. As we can see in Daman that, Durga wants to continue her education but her husband doesn't agree with her and says to her that "My mother is at home uneducated. She is still happy. This is a woman. Nowadays we don’t find a good model of women". This kind of reality is internalized by most Indian women and they accept it.

In a similar manner, in Indian culture the fact has been recognized that motherhood means sacrificing. In Daman the police officer seeing Durga sacrifice her happiness and her desires for the sake of her daughter says "All this is for your daughter. What about you? Don’t you want to give yourself a new lease of life? Don’t you want to complete your education? By falling in self pity you are forgetting the fact that you should be standing on your own feet". However, in keeping with the expectations from the society, Durga keeps on tolerating her husband’s cruelty and escapes only when the safety of her daughter is threatened.

In Mrityudand too we find the typical gender stereotypes of women. There is Chandravati who is portrayed as a helpless woman unable to stand up to her husband despite his ill-treatment of her. She says to her sister-in-law "You can put up a fight. Sometimes you may even win. Once you begin to lose, you will give up fighting. And you will begin to tolerate. And then you will know what it means to be a woman". It has thus been portrayed that women should be polite and obey their husbands and other male members of family. Overall, we are given to believe that women should be
submissive, obedient, pure and self sacrificing to be counted as ‘good’ and any woman challenging their authority is branded a trouble maker.

**Caste System**

Indian social structure is based upon the caste system. These are hierarchically ordered and named groups into which members are born. Caste members, as far as possible, marry within the caste or sub-caste and follow caste rules with respect to diet, ritual and aspects of life. Inter-caste marriages are not permitted as a rule, although now it has become quite common in the urban areas. The Dalits are treated as untouchables as they do the menial jobs of removing the night soil or cleaning the streets. The Constitution does not permit the practice of untouchability and those practicing it can be persecuted. However, the practice continues. Of course, with growing urbanization, the caste system is undergoing many changes. Yet caste continues to remain a dominant force in the Indian society. Even in urban elite societies, caste plays an important role. Although class is the more dominant paradigm in popular cinema, Caste too remains a part of mainstream cinema as a more general form of social structure.

Films in India have been the most potent tool and canvas of popular culture, popular imagination and prevalent social norms and beliefs. In this sense it has always depicted the caste system in most real and equally romanticized and melodramatic forms. From suffering untouchables to crooked Brahmana (priest) to greedy Mahajana (moneylender), it has depicted all (Kumar, 2011). As per the caste system marriage of low caste and high caste is not favored. In Daman we find that the heroine of the movie belongs to a low caste and her husband belongs to a high caste. During some familial problem the father-in-law says to his wife that "You made Sanjay helpless to get married in a lower caste. We have made a very big mistake. You thought that being from a poor family she would prove to be an ideal wife. God knows that until now with whom she must be having a secret love affair. She couldn’t give us a grandson till now. Sanjay is absolutely right. She is a whore". Thus we can see how the caste factor is highlighted at every little occasion.

In Mrityudand too, the relevance of caste system has been shown. In a scene where Vinay goes to apply for a job, it is clearly shown that the chances of getting the job depend upon the caste of the applicant. In fact, to what extent caste permeates the
life of an Indian is clear from the story of Chandravati and Rambaran, a low caste man. When Chandravati, a high caste woman has a relationship with a low caste man and becomes pregnant, their punishment is the same as the one given to the young widow in the beginning of the film – death.

**Violence**

Gender based violence against women poses a threat to women’s lives across the globe as never before. Women face violence directly and indirectly at every stage of their lives. Violence against women appears to stem from the patriarchal belief that women are property which men have the right to abuse and control. It could be husbands, fathers or brothers.

As in all patriarchal societies, in India too domestic violence is an extremely powerful instrument for suppression of women. Because of covert social and religious sanction, women are expected to bear the brunt of physical and other forms of torture without expressing protest. Women are conditioned to internalize this grievous injustice and thus become active participants in carrying forward oppressive legacy. Domestic violence is gender-based violence, which is a major component of human insecurity. Domestic violence derives from the social construction, distribution of power, in which women are subordinated subjects. Feminist scholars are particularly concerned that popular films in India too often portray women in stereotypical roles of subordination accepting sexual violence as a normal part of relationships with men (Dasgupta and Hegde, 1988). Further, they have pointed out that men’s abuse of women is often gloried within Indian cinema (Derne, 1999).

Violence against women physically, sexually and mentally is depicted in both films under scrutiny. In *Daman* in a scene the husband insults Durga and paints her face. When she objects he tells her "I don’t want to hear anything. Keep quiet. You are my beautiful, my illiterate, my ignorant, my dark wife, the colors that I am painting on your face, you are looking more beautiful. I respect you. You are the mother Goddess. You are pure. I touch your feet. If not Goddess then the whore will do, right?" And in one of the most horrific scenes the man rapes his wife in a very brutal manner and taunts her verbally. Thus, quite evidently he perpetrates physical and verbal violence on her.
After being brutally beaten and raped by her husband, when Durga visits the temple a woman says to Durga: “Now your wounds have almost healed, isn’t it?” To this she replies, “The wounds that are there on my soul will never be healed. Never, never”. This expression represents how much women suffer mental and physical domination in a male centric society.

In Mrityudand too, we can find sequences which represent exploitation and violence against women. The film begins with a scene where two women from the village are lynched by a mob of angry men. They are hounded, cornered and then killed with sharp weapons by the men. The reason very simply is that one of them, a 22 year old widow has got pregnant after an affair with a man in the village which goes against the traditional patriarchal norms of the society and for this she and her mother who tries to protect her have to pay with their lives.

Women’s exploitation and vulnerability to violence is shown in a scene where a man says to a village woman who is poor and needs work for earning money “What are you so worked up about? Come to me tonight. I will pay you”. When Kanti, the maid has to sleep with the moneylender she says “My husband borrowed money from the contractor when his father fell ill. He keeps sending money to him. But it’s never enough. I worked for the contractor when the crusher was running. But he never paid me. And he forces me to go to bed with him whenever he wants it”. This shows how men in dominant positions of power can do anything to the women in a community and women who cannot complain and accept abuse and exploitation silently.

Even Vinay, an otherwise gentle person, under the influence of other men hits his wife when she tries to argue with him. Regarding verbal violence, we see that most of the men abuse the women verbally. Ketki’s brother-in-law humiliates her and says “Your impending doom has driven you crazy. Similarly the contractor tells poor woman “What do you think you can do? A whore. You will not live to do that bitch”. In a same manner he says to the protagonist that “Shut up, you harlot. You feigned the illness to have a good time. A slut like you should be whipped in public”. As it has been represented, men can easily assault women physically and verbally. Thus, in both films not only violence against women is depicted in a graphic manner, but the message is also given that this violence is the norm in the Indian society and not only the men but even the women accept it as such.
Themes of Agency

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on the one hand she is at the peak of the ladder of success, then on the other she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members.

An investigation on the position of Indian women cannot be done outside the social framework. Indian society has a traditional and hierarchical social structure based on caste, community and class. It has fostered numerous inequalities which affect both men and women (Kasturi, 1994). Historically, women have played a significant role in the social and political structure of India. In many regions, women remain very submissive, although with the improved education levels, women have become more assertive. India is changing politically, economically and socially, at a swift pace and it is to be hoped that the condition and status of women in India is slowly changing and rising.

As time went on, the status of women in India kept on evolving. The process of improvement in the status of women in India started from the time of freedom movements in India. Women effectively and actively took part in the freedom movement of the country along with men. They fought hand in hand with men for India's independence. Female leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Lakshmi Bai and many others raised their voices and were heard. Women of all sections and societies revolted against the purdah system indicating that they did not like living within the four walls of their houses. They came out and showed to the worlds that women in India could do as much as men, and even better. In a sense Indian women got back their honor and dignity. The implication here is that although women faced oppression and difficulties due to the structure of the society, they also overcame these problems due to their agency. Their journey from objects to subjects was recorded in films as well, including Daman and Mrityudand. In both films the issue of women's agency is dealt with by focusing on factors such as education, decision making and participation, empowerment and rebellion.

Education

The rise of feminist ideas has led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition throughout the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of
the most pressing demands of these women's rights movements. Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women, the greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society. Education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence, necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life that social structure throws at her (Sambangi, 2010).

Since the prehistoric times women were denied opportunities and had to suffer due to the hegemonic masculine ideology. This unjustifiable oppression had resulted into a movement that fought to achieve the equal status of women all over the world. Women's education in India is the consequence of its progress and it has led to the tremendous improvement in women's condition. More importantly, it has helped bolster the agency of women.

In Daman the director pays great attention to the topic of education of women. When Durga's husband finds her after she has left him and wants to take their daughter with him she talks to her husband about equal right between man and woman and importance of women's education. She asserts that "My friend and I were discussing marriage and studies. She was telling me how liberal her husband is. He believes in equal rights for man and woman in marriage. And I told my friend that I too wanted to finish my studies but you refused. Now no one will come in my child's way. She will have every right to complete her education and choose her own husband. She will not be like me". In this film we can see that Durga's husband wants his daughter married at an early age without completing her studies. Durga feels angry and says that "I just want Deepa to have a bright future now. I want her to complete her education. To ensure that I am ready to do any work".

In the second film Mrityudand, the protagonist is an educated woman who gets married after receiving her college degree. She has a strong character and manages different situations of familial and public relations in her village community. Although in this film there is no direct focus on the subject of the education of women yet it is quite clear that it is Ketki, an educated woman who is the first woman to rebel against the patriarchal system and it is she who motivates the other women to join her in this fight against male domination. Thus in both films although women's education is not a focal issue, yet its importance is depicted.
**Decision Making and Participation**

In most societies males make the importance decisions in the family and in the society. In the family as well as in the society the decision making power is denied to the women, which makes women voiceless, destroys their self-confidence and cause them to feel less important in the family as well as in the society. In India too, a large percentage of women do not have decision making power. They cannot make decisions independently, not even related to their own life. They have to take permission of male members for each and every issue, be it their education, marriage, or their children.

Autonomy is the ability to obtain information and make decisions about one's own concerns. It facilitates access to material resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth, and social resources such as knowledge, power, prestige within the family and community (Acharya and Bell, 2010). Limitations to women's physical, sexual, economic, social and political autonomy may affect women's decision-making processes. On the contrary if the women attain this autonomy, it becomes a source of their empowerment and agency.

Both films have shown how once the women take the first step towards decision making autonomy, the process of their liberation begins. In *Daman* Durga, who could not take decisions regarding her own life, becomes empowered when she decides that she would not let her daughter suffer the same fate and would ensure that her daughter gets the right to make the decisions related to her life. She says to her daughter, "It will not happen as long as I am alive. You will have all the rights to choose your life partner. You have to complete your education. You have to reach your goal. You have to achieve something and prove yourself".

In *Mrityudand* too, Ketki chooses the way she would lead her life in the face of great resistance as she feels that she can recognize what is right and what is wrong for her. In a scene when she is taking her sister-in-law away from their house for recuperation after an illness, she is asked by a woman "Why are you leaving your husband in this condition? Don’t you need to look after him and his needs?" She answers "It will be just for a couple of days. The cook and the maid can take care of the men folk". This is a small step towards exerting her power of decision making. Also, when Chandravati realizes that she is pregnant with the child of her lover, she
Empowerment and Rebellion

Empowerment contains within it, the word power. So naturally it follows that empowerment is about power and about changing the balance of power. As far as the women’s empowerment is concerned, it is about gaining control over one’s life which includes many dimensions such as economic, social and political (Bheemarasetty, 2012). Comprehensively, women’s empowerment is a state of being that reflects a certain level of critical consciousness about external realities and an awareness about their internal thought construction and belief systems that affect their well being in terms of gender justice and social justice, as well as the determination to use their physical, intellectual emotional and spiritual resources to protect their lives and sustain values that guarantee gender equity at personal, social, economic, political and institutional level.

Recognizing women’s rights and believing their ability are essential for women’s empowerment and development. Once women realize their own capabilities and potentials it strengthens their self image and fosters them with confidence to take action in life. Empowerment of women is the fundamental to the basics of human rights where women have neither to beg for power nor search for power hierarchy to exercise power against others. On the contrary they demand to be accepted as human first of all.

Indian society has been marked by male chauvinism but now the society has started to realize women’s importance and is slowly learning to accept women’s empowerment and women as active agents, participating in and guiding their own development. Signs of this can be seen in cinematic narratives also.

In Daman, the director has emphasized women's empowerment and improvement of women's status with help of education. In a sequence the police officer expresses his perception about women's empowerment and tells Durga that "Be aware. Move ahead in life. Get out of this lonely existence. You can fight against the atrocities of men. You can demand for safe guarding women's rights and fight for
protecting their self respect. Only the laws of the country will not be able to protect you. You will find yourself strong and well equipped only with a weapon like education. This will cause social awareness among women”. She replies that "That is why I will complete Deepa’s (her daughter’s) education. She will have every right to live life. I will not create any obstacles in her life. Neither will I force her into marriage. She should be economically independent so that no man can treat with her the way my husband did with me”.

In Mrityudand also we can observe the heroine Ketki, an educated woman, is a very strong person. After her husband started to abuse her, he wants to touch her. But she tells him that "Don’t touch me. There is a limit to one’s tolerance. Do you think you could drag me into bed, after just saying sorry? Would that set everything right? What do you think women are? Mere toys? Everything is finished; I’ve fallen in my own esteem. Hitting me is not a small thing. Does this not matter much to you? Do I have no identity of my own? Do I not matter at all”? When her husband tells her "What about my needs? You remember your limits woman”, she replies "You can't define limits with violence. You are my husband, not God". Clearly Ketki comes across as a strong person who has the strength to defy her husband although they live in a highly patriarchal system.

In another sequence when Kanti the maid tells Ketki about her apprehensions regarding the contractor to whom her husband owes money and who is asking for sexual favors in return, Ketki says to her "He can't force you to repay. And he can't burn your house. It's just that you don’t know what the law says. You mustn't be afraid if he comes calling again. Don’t think you are weak just because you are a woman". Through this statement she offers hope to all women who feel helpless in the face of patriarchy by making them aware of their rights.

Similarly, the idea of women rebelling against the man made norms is also presented in both films. With regards to women's agency and rebellion, Durga in Daman rebels against the misbehavior of her husband and leaves him taking her daughter with her whom she is planning to marry off to an old man. And when he becomes a nuisance in their life and she feels her daughter’s life is threatened by him, she finally becomes Mother Durga, the Hindu goddess signifying female dynamism, who is the destroyer and slayer of demons, and kills her husband rebelling against the image of the dutiful wife who tolerates everything her husband does.
It is interesting to mention that Durga's daughter is quite unlike her mother. She clearly expresses her feeling of hatred towards her father for causing her mother's sufferings. She tells her boyfriend, "I am not a devoted and submissive wife. My father has returned to make life hell for me and my mom. Protecting women, love, marriage is that all you men can think about. I don't want to be dependent on you or any other man. What made you think that I will remain just a wife and go through all the agony my mother has gone through all her life". She, too, rebels against the stereotype of the 'good girl' that she is expected to be.

In *Mrityudand* too, the presentation of women's empowerment and rebellion is done through various scenes. In one such sequence, a poor woman in village stands up to her boss when he treats her in badly. The man says to her that "You talk to me in this way in front of the whole village. What do you think you can do? A whore". She replies that "If I am the whore you are my pimp. I'll say it. A hundred times over! I spit on you." It is an important moment as an ordinary women stands up to the might of a powerful man.

In another sequence some women under the leadership of Ketki go to Tripat Singh's place to protect a poor woman. The man says to her that "Enjoy the display of my power. Welcome to the show". She asserts that "I can see Contractor Tripat Singh. But I am amazed. Why aren't all these people who seem to be enjoying your circus, not clapping? May be your show isn't over yet. Maybe this poor woman hasn't been abused enough. What are you waiting for? Go ahead. Rip her clothes off. Show the people the power of your brute force. Then they will clap for you. They will cheer you all the way. And they will remember this circus for a long time to come. I'll leave of course. But not without my sister. Stop me if you can. Maul me if you will. Perhaps the villagers will enjoy your circus even more." This impressive scene reveals that how women can come together and break men's domination and rebel against patriarchy.

Then there is Chandravati, the otherwise meek and traditional wife of Ketki's brother-in-law who rebels against the social norms by bearing a low caste man's child because her husband neglects her. On learning about this, the husband tries to hit her and she tells him in this scene, "Come on. Try and kill me. Show me your strength. Even if it be like this, let me for once, feel the pleasure of fulfillment. What a hypocrite".
you are. I was dead for all you cared. Why have you come back now? To assert your authority? To exhibit your might? Did you think you can hurt me just because I am a woman? You thought you could break me. I too am full of life. I want to live”.

It is worth noting that the director of Mrityudand has emphasized women’s agency which has been portrayed in many sequences as mentioned above. There is an impressive statement in end of the movie about women’s empowerment. Ketki tells the audience that “Do not think I am weak. Do not deprive me of my dignity. I am not powerless. I have done my duty as a woman. I shall bear my responsibility as a mother. With all my love I shall nourish my child. And I shall tell my child never do an injustice to the weak. And never ever succumb to injustice.”

Thus, as the above discussion on the films Daman and Mrityudand has made it clear cinema can be an important medium for the depiction of both the structural dimensions of a society, as also the agency phenomenon.