

CHAPTER IV

Cinematic Analysis of Deepa Mehta's *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*

After comparatively exploring the two intricate yet significant art forms (text and theatre), the next job in this comparative research endeavor is to join in another important yet complex genre, that is, of cinema. Cinema appeared a little more than a century ago to develop into one of the most effective forms of expression that has made its impact on practically every field of theory and practice. Cinema, frequently subtitled by Maxim Gorky as “the Kingdom of shadows” (10) is both an intricate art form and a successful entertainment business. It is meant to be seen and heard and thus appeals both the visual and the audial senses of the humans. Cinema's dictum of happy ending easily takes most of its viewers out of their boring everyday lives into a beautiful fantasy land of happiness and contentment. Maria T. Pramaggiore, Tom Wallis while explaining the magnetic aura of films writes:

When a 35 mm film is projected in a movie theatre, a powerful beam of light pass through translucent celluloid to produce those “shadows”, depicting larger than life images on the big screen... The audience immerse themselves in the lives of the fictional characters, develop opinions about historical events, and become captivated by the artistic combination of light, sound and color. (3)

Thus, the world of cinema reveals not only the certainty in itself but a fresh appearance allied to the world of impressions. However, this description provides a synoptic view of the distinct appeal which the genre of cinema creates among its audience. To accomplish the complete understanding of the genre of cinema it is vital to begin with the genesis of this art form.

1. A Kaleidoscopic view of the Genesis and Growth of Indian Cinema

Cinema is regarded as one, among the finest of the plastic arts. In context of such a consideration, it is important to understand the psychological motive behind the conception of these plastic arts. It is the practice of embalming the dead which is the strikingly distinct hidden motive. This seems to be a strange thought but the practice

might disclose the, until now, unnoticed fact of the “mummy complex” being the basic origin. The belief of “mummy complex” basically belongs to ancient Egypt which aspired against death and saw survival in the continued existence of the physical body. Through this challenge to give resistance against the passage of time, Egyptian civilization contended the basic psychological need in man for continued survival. This procedure was delineated by unnaturally protecting the physical body and thus stealing it from the passage of time and restricting it completely from the flow of life.

Similar conception of thought also affected the evolution of art and civilization of those times. Such preservation gave impetus to rise of sculpture and painting which tried to bind time in images. Nevertheless with the course of time, the thought process behind such art formation adjoined with immortal illusion a much larger thought process that is the formation of an ultimate world in the likeness of the real, with its own sequential destiny. Seen from this sociological perspective, the conception of camera work and finally films provide an obvious justification for the likeness for survival of timeless realities. Andre Malraux describes in this context, “the cinema as the furthest evolution to date of plastic realism, the beginnings of which were first manifest at the Renaissance” (qtd in Andre Bazin 10)

Besides this, with the passing of years and upcoming of industrial revolution and worldwide economic liberalization have enhanced this art form. Many factors including: money business, publicity, mass culture of entertainment and celebrity, technological experiments had joined hand in hand to bring forth the world of cinema to make it stand forefront in the long queue of genre popularity. Henceforth, from twentieth century onwards the genre of cinema has no look backs.

Cinematic world witnessed its wide-reaching ranging from: Western to Asian and European to Australian continent. However in India, the progress path of cinema world went many ups and downs before the era of its success began. The emergence of cinema in India, in early twentieth century, as a strong instrument to manipulate the masses aroused a lot of anxieties in the colonial state. Cinema was regarded as a social threat, and censorship was demanded in context of the unacceptable corrupting influence of the American films on locals. While the colonial leaders and conservative

Indian influential's highlighted the debasing threat of cinema, nationalists like Lala Lajpat Rai, took a strong radical position, as harbinger of modernity, opposing such conservative censorships. Such circumstances prevailed long after independence too. In this context, Manju Jain writes "for several decades after independence, the Indian state would continue with the same censorship rules formed by the same colonial logic with the nationalists taking refuge in the conservative opinion that they had so firmly opposed earlier"(X).

Times changed and fortunately for the Indian cinema the period of 1920-1947 saw extraordinary development in Indian film industry. The era represented the most decisive phase of India's anti-colonial struggle in which the colonial ingredients of modernity (represented especially by cinema) were negotiated in an attempt to foreground Indian identity. During this time, an American-trained Suchet Singh released *Shakuntala* with Dorothy Kingdom and other imported actors. Kohinoor's *Bbakta Vidur*, banned in Madras and Sind became India's first censorship controversy. Films such as *Bilet Pherat* (anti-western satire by Dhiren Ganguly), *Razia Begum*(Hindu- Muslim love by B.P Mishra and Nanubhai desai, *Bulbul-e-Parastan*(film adaptation of a social reform novel by first Indian female producer and director, Fatama Begum) were released . The East India Film Co. started in Calcutta, pioneering Bengali, Tamil and Telugu film making, Punjab Film Corp. was founded in Lahore and Prithvi Raj Kapoor launched Prithvi theatres in Bombay. There were many more progressive steps taken in cinematic field which made this period a highly developmental cinematic phase. (Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Paul Willemen, 19-20)

Consequently, with the flight of time from ancient eras to contemporary age, with many reformative radical measures, it has become axiomatic to believe that not only has Indian cinema reached the stage of excessive popularity but has also acquired a global status. The scope and reach of Indian media-especially the Mumbai-based industry named "Bollywood"-has never been greater, whether through International film festivals, international co-productions, global cable channels, internet or the multiplexes. Finally, Indian cinema surpassed the regional boundaries and saw its strong existence in terms of international standards. For instance, Indian directors started to employ cinematic power dynamics to display binary thematic dimensions:

Local –Global, East-West, Motherland –Diaspora and Traditional-Modern. However, A. Basu points out that, these binaries “are not always antagonistically posed but eclectically combined, often in quiet a radical way”(5) as part of the global assemblage. Moreover, even foreign directors start opting for Indian themes and milieu in their movies. Thus a transculturalist framework got adapted regarding to the consumption of the Indian cinema to aid hybridized practises associated with content and context. (David J. Schaefer, Kavita Karan 1-4)

A much prior attempt to depict such a similar binary cliché was witnessed in 1970 through a film with the title *East and West (Purab aur Paschim)*. The film aimed to showcase the much accredited spiritual, chaste and superior ‘East’ in comparison to materialistic and sexually degraded ‘West’ to a simplistic extreme level. This movie was an example of a wide range of ideological generalizations regarding the existential conflict between East and West. But, a radical change in this conventional globalized thought came in 1995 when it was the official moment of globalization for Bollywood, or Mumbai Cinema. It was Aditya Chopra’s *Dil Walle Dulhaniya Le Jayege* which brought a serious global cinematic progressive change. In this movie, the Non Resident Indian, until now portrayed as an insignificant outsider with affected speech and manners was transferred and validated into a strong Indian national subject. Joining two continents, the story as it unfolds was completely Indian, in spite of the major characters living their lives in England. This film is significant in the context of setting up a new trend for the depiction of new form of globalized Indian identity. Likewise, this section of the thesis focuses upon, yet another, Indo-Western movie by Anglo-Indian director Deepa Mehta, (*Videsh –Heaven on Earth*) which focuses upon the difficulties and circumstance of Indian diaspora abroad.

Videsh-Heaven on Earth is a movie adaptation of Neelam Mansingh’s theatre work *Naga-Chayya* which is based on Girish Karnad’s text *Naga-Mandala*. Just as frequent in other forms of adaptation, cinematic adaptations also found there easy source in literature. But along came the much expected criticism which dismissed them as unworthy creations and provoked many derogatory reviews. This led to the role of the adaptation genre within film industry as an academically ignored one. Film adaptors were continuously attacked from three communities: film critics, literary critics and the

audience. They gave many reasons for its failure, for instance, unfaithful depiction, aesthetically disastrous or too filmy or unreal.

Apparently all such criticism became unimportant and irrelevant when this academic of cinematic adaptations brought in large sum of money. These financial successes poured in back to back cinematic adaptations and critics just helplessly saw this trend to overrule the cinema industry. This led to an inseparable association between the Bollywood industry and the growing trend of adaptation business. In Bollywood, cultural borrowing and textual remaking became apparent in an array of different types; from shot-for-shot re-enactment and emulating reverent movies, to more subtle and momentary flashes of citation, reference and intertextuality.

However this progressing phase also saw its dark clouds when some flops and poor directions again led critics to start their criticism. Sidelining the major intricacies involved in this process, again this field was just left for the mockery and contempt of reviewers. Basically, remake texts; inescapably fell prey to the rules of fidelity and the criticism of the devout protectors of the film/literary canons from which they often escape. In his survey of pre-1980s Hollywood movie remakes, Michael B Druxman opines about the on the threat that issues of fidelity carries for the remake directions, “people cling to their precious memories of a grander cinema in days gone by and...almost no remake – despite its quality – can shatter the fondness a spectator might hold for the original version he saw in his youth. It's called nostalgia” (24). However, such dialogues again diverted the audience from more constructive traits of remake cinema. As Brian Macfarlane notes, the fidelity dispute prevents the drawing of awareness to, “adaptation as inevitable artistic (and culturally rich) progress; the more interesting process of transference and adaptation; [and] the powerfully influential production determinants in the film remake which may be irrelevant to the original”(10).

Fortunately, with the passage of time, adaptation logicians have tried to change the target away from much relative character-analysis towards systematic interpretation. For instance, notable theorist Robert Stam has anticipated that remakes/adaptations should be judged as “translations” (*Film Adaptation* 62), encouraging an analysis of an

approach similar to authentic transcripts subjected to generate new meanings, perspectives and experiences. With time the intellectual excerpts written on film remaking has been itself confirming such approaches and perspectives. For example, some theorists argue that remaking is a basic part of all cinemas, and that all texts are valid to the term since every film is accountable of re-presentation or prior conception. As Robert Stam comments: “All texts are tissues of anonymous formulae... conscious and unconscious quotations, and, confluences and inversions of other texts” (“Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” 64). (Iain Robert Smith 195-196)

Although the abovementioned evaluations may definitely be significant in terms of examining commercial filmic adaptations of William Shakespeare or Jane Austen but they do not sufficiently explain the trend of Bollywood remakes. For Bollywood, the concept of remaking is perhaps more of a sudden phenomenon rather than a usual progression. Since 2001, Bollywood has undergone many vital alterations – foremost in provisions of official creativity. Iain Robert Smith while giving examples of this new criterion of Bollywood writes:

This has included increased experimentations with special effects (*Krrish* [2006], *Love Story: 2050* [2008], *Drona* [2008]), narrative chronology (*Saathiya* [2002]), new genres (vis-à-vis the rise of horror, sci-fi, heist and super-hero movies), as well, as its high-profiled appearance in international award festivals - *Devdas* (2002) at Cannes, *Lagaan* (2001) at the 2002 Oscars. It has also given birth to a booming series of foreign film adaptations, such as *Kaante* (2002) (*Reservoir Dogs* [1992]), *Koi...Mil Gaya* (2003) (*E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* [1982]), *Krishna Cottage* (2004) (*Ringu* [1998]), *Sarkar* (2005) (*The Godfather* [1972]), *Fight Club: Members Only* (2006) (*Fight Club* [1999]), *Partner* (2007) (*Hitch* [2005]) and *Ghajini* (2008) (*Memento* [2000]).(197)

Stories like *Devdas* have been so popular that it found almost nine remakes: in 1928 by Naresh Mitra as a silent movie; 1935 by P.C. Barua in Bengali (and redone in Hindi a year after); 1953 in Tamil and Telugu by Vedantam Raghavaiah; 1955 by Bimal Roy; 1974 in Telugu by Vijaya Nirmala; 1979 in Bengali by Dilip Roy. More recently,

2002 saw the release of two more versions by Bengal's Shakti Samanta and the high-profile Bollywood block-buster by Sanjay Leela Bhansali - whilst Anurag Kashyap endeavoured to renew the story with his latter-day version *Dev.D* (2009). Nevertheless, it is much essential to consider that these remakes are literary adaptations and not copies or sequels of original film screenplays, the latter of which have only surfaced in paucity over the past 20 years.

These examples are mentioned to clarify the instant widespread popularity of literary adaptations in Bollywood industry and *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* is yet another such example. It is based on canonical work of Girish Karnad *Naga-Mandala* and adapted on screen by Deepa Mehta. Before setting out to analyse the movie adaptation, it is of immense importance to have a glimpse of the biographical sketch of Deepa Mehta, the director of the movie.

2. Life and Works of Deepa Mehta

Life- Bearing an Indo-Canadian origin, Deepa Mehta, a foremost female director of the modern era was born in 1950 in Amritsar, a border city between India and Pakistan. Previously, Deepa Mehta's father, a film distributor, was strained to shift to Amritsar from Lahore because of the brutality due to the partition of India. Those were the times when she grew up hearing stories of rape and massacre that occurred during relocation in partition. She depicted a very similar story in her film *Earth* (1998). After a short stay in Amritsar the whole family shifted to New Delhi when Deepa Mehta was just a young girl. Later, she studied in Welham Girls High School, a boarding school for girls in Dehradun. Next, she received her graduation from Lady Shri Ram College for Woman, Delhi. Deepa Mehta always wanted to be a doctor but destiny had some other plans for her. Maturing within cinema addictive surroundings, Deepa Mehta got herself wedged up with the documentary filmmaking after she finished her master's degree in Philosophy from Delhi University. When Deepa Mehta was considering pursuing a PhD, she was requested to toil with a production company to create documentaries for the Indian government (Banning and Levitin 274). While working in this company, Mehta apprenticed a range of film techniques such as editing, sound, camera work, and narrative development, and she made her first documentary

film on child bride. It was the time she met Paul Saltzman, a Canadian documentarian who was producing a documentary on the High Commissioner of India at that time. (Banning and Levitin 274-275)

Deepa Mehta migrated to Canada in 1973 after marrying Paul Saltzman and established a production company, Sunrise Films with her brother Dilip Mehta, a photojournalist and husband Paul Saltzman. At Sunrise, Mehta directed, produced, and edited for small screen. The couple got divorced in 1993. They had a daughter, Devyani Saltzman, an applauded author and a reviewer. Currently Deepa Mehta is wedded to David Hamilton. (Interview by Kass Banning and Jacqueline Levitin 273-277)

Career- After working for television series *Danger Bay*, in 1985, Deepa Mehta made a documentary on her brother photojournalist Dilip Mehta named *Travelling Light: The Photojournalism of Dilip Mehta*. This work secured her international acclaim at the 1987 New York International Film and Television Festival. At this time, Deepa Mehta also won Best Feature Film Award at the 11th International Women's Film Festival in Italy for a television feature *Martha, Ruth & Edie*. But, it was as *Sam & Me* which won for her the first victory as a feature film debut in 1991.

Sam & Me is a narrative about an Indian naïve boy who lands in Canada with much optimism and assumptions but ends up being annoyed when he just gets a menial work of a warden of an aged father of his uncle's manager. According to Jacqueline Levitin, "[m]ore than a tale of a young Indian abroad, the film is an indictment of a country that is multicultural in name only. Coming from a comfortable family background, Mehta had been shocked in Canada to find herself viewed as a brown-skinned 'other'" (282). After *Sam & Me*'s success, Deepa Mehta worked on episodes of George Lucas's television series *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* (1992) and *Travels with Father* (1994).

Deepa Mehta directed an extravagantly expensive feature film *Camilla* in 1994, which was a Canadian/UK production. This time her story line was about a strong companionship and familiarity amid an aged woman and a youthful woman. But, unfortunately, this film failed to fulfill box office expectations. This movie was a

turning event in Deepa Mehta's life and she finally resolved to compose only those films which stirred her.

It was in 1996 that Deepa Mehta made her first film of her much renowned elemental trilogy, *Fire, Water and Earth*. *Fire* (1996) narrating an unusual account revolves around the story of two sisters-in-law who dare to go against the patriarchal customs and standardized roles and duties consigned to women in a Hindu joint family and gets drawn in a homosexual relationship. Since the movie portrayed the lesbian relationship as well as the alleged misinterpretation of women in Hindu society, it provoked widespread censure and aggressive reaction among Hindu religious fanatics, diasporic thinkers and feminists. Her second film of the elemental trilogy in the series *1947 Earth* came in 1998, which depicted the atrocious racial hostility executed against the masses during the partition of India in 1947.

Finally, in 2000 Deepa Mehta started her shooting of *Water*, the last film of the elemental trilogy, about the cultural, social, religious and economic exclusion of Hindu widows in India. The issue dealt in the movie created much hue and cry among the Hindu fundamentalists and as a result Deepa Mehta was strained to abscond from India before the completion of her film shooting. The film had to be forsaken for a while and was later moved to a more amiable locate and shot in secrecy. It was finally released in 2005 in a package totally different from the original. This followed widespread recognition and applause: at the eighth International Indian Film Academy Awards, Deepa Mehta's was adjudged the most outstanding achievement by an Indian in International Cinema.

For next two years Deepa Mehta focused her attention on her other projects and came out with *Bollywood/Hollywood* in 2002 and the *Republic of Love* in 2003 but then went on to finish the shooting of *Water* in Sri Lanka in 2005. This controversial movie was later chosen for the 2007 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. In 2008, Deepa Mehta adapted Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* into a film, *Heaven on Earth* which depicted the household brutality personated on a newly married immigrant woman in Canada. In 2012, she completed the adaptation of Indian born British writer Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, which was released in 2012. According

to the media reports, Deepa Mehta than involved herself in working on a script based on Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel *Secret Daughter* about how two families are connected through ceremonial adoption. Currently, she is conducting research for her first Hollywood production, tentatively called *The Julia Project*. Besides she is also working for her heavy budget, most challenging movie *The Exclusion* which centers upon the plight of 375 asylum –seekers from India who were escaping the British and reached Canada, aboard a hired ship, the *Komagata Maru* in 1914.

Credit and Style-Deepa Mehta has been accredited as one of the representative directors of South Asian Diaspora. She has carved out a niche for herself in the media as a true ambassador of the freedom of expression. Although a number of other diasporic directors have dealt with the traumas, troubles, tears and laughter of the Indian society abroad but Deepa Mehta has taken her take on India in a big way. She stands apart in this context as she is quite explicit about her plan as a filmmaker chiefly in the context of her trilogy on India. In one of her interviews with Richard Philips, she while sharing her thoughts about India comments:

There are several conceptions that prevail in the west about India. There is firstly the spiritual India – a place where you go and find nirvana. Secondly, there is the conception that India is entirely poverty stricken...It is uncomfortable and difficult for some filmmakers to produce works that destroy these perceptions. India brings specifically fixed images in many western minds, and the minute you start de-exoticising that, you deal with Indians as real people. (“Worlds Socialist Website”)

Deepa Mehta felt disgusted with the existing stereotypes of Indian cinema and apparently this provided her the fuel to manifest an endeavour to go against all prevailing myths and superstitions.

Deepa Mehta's creations particularly her elemental trilogy--*Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005) - portray women's ascendancy by the patriarchal sacred and conformist ideologies of India during the said era. These films showcase women's fight for her identity and empowerment as a protest against the long lasting time-honored

power relations in Indian society and culture. Mehta's trilogy (*Fire* [Canada/India, 1996], *Earth* [Canada/India, 1998] and *Water*) connects the fundamental with the feminine and inspects the way women are devastated upon and fettered by social institutions, crushed and traded upon by patriarchy. The trilogy symbolizes in its entirety a strong and significant cultural challenge to the controlling masculine standards and practices of repression, subjugation and exploitation of women. Deepa Mehta, herself is a strong-willed personality and her guts in the face of threats and negativity by largely patriarchal forces must be recognized as the immensely relevant preface to her film *Water*. The film documents, perhaps a little melodramatically, the marginalized life of forgotten Hindu widows battling to survive the harsh realities of neglect and poverty.

Thus, the most remarkable facet of Deepa Mehta's filmmaking is that she successfully constructs Indian women as persona of power and strength. Subeshini Moodely in her thesis about depiction of post-colonial feminism in accented cinema, opines about Deepa Mehta that she erects:

Indian women as *metaphors for the resistance* of nationalist ideals as opposed to constructing Indian women as *symbols* of nationalist ideals. This unique approach relates to Hamid Naficy's(2001) surrounding the ambivalent relationship that 'accented' filmmakers experience and maintain with their homeland.(80)

This delicate and complex relationship is usually marked by the creation of uncertainty and doubt about the taken-for-granted values of the home society. In the case of Deepa Mehta, her living abroad has not only helped her to investigate impartially, the age old ethics and morals inscribed in India's history and religious myths but also facilitated her to scrutinize the manner in which these beliefs contributes to the constructed notion of Indian womanhood.

At the same time, her diasporic status has engendered a lot of controversy in context of her films because for the critics she is in a privileged position to judge and understate Indian beliefs. For instance, Indian and diasporic intellectuals and feminist critics Madhu Kishwar and Uma Parameswaran condemn Mehta's portrayals of Indian

culture, women, and religion and question Mehta's privileged diasporic position and her lack of authenticity. The Hindu religious fundamentalist groups also burned Deepa Mehta's effigy, wrecked her film sets, and threatened her. These groups even forced Deepa Mehta to leave India without finishing the shooting of *Water*. This film took a lot of hard work and pain to complete and later called for widespread applause and praise.

Thus Deepa Mehta's films portray women against different backdrops-in violence-torn historical moments, in the humdrum domestic arena and also in the specific socio-temporal frame work of a severe society. Her films are not just sociological surveys but they cut across different disciplines like history, politics, literature, media and mass culture.

This present undertaking focuses on the analysis of Deepa Mehta's film *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*. It was in 1989 Deepa Mehta saw Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry's version of *Naga-Mandala*, written by India's applauded writer, performer and director, Girish Karnad. The play itself is founded on an aged Indian folk tale about a lonesome and depressing wife who finds console when she is tripped by a snake who has taken the appearance of her husband. The play left a powerful mark in Deepa Mehta's memory and then in 2004, at a function in Edmonton, she met Mona Gill, a young Punjabi woman. They got to chatting and she continued to inform Deepa Mehta her sad tale from what made her to shift from Punjab to Canada and her final destiny. Her arranged marriage to a Sikh man soon ended up into an offensive bond which was fuelled further into physical violence by the attendance of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law in the joint family. It was only after the birth of her daughter that she got the courage to leave her cruel husband. Her miserable story was nothing but a saga of loneliness and an emotional and bodily hell. Very bravely, she broke the code of silence, which is regarded as obligatory prerequisite as far as marriage in South Asian culture is concerned. As a salute to this great example of courage, The National Film Board of Canada dedicated a documentary on her.

Ironically, Mona's story was not an unusual one as Deepa Mehta knew that plenty of women from the South Asian community face pretty much the same torture and mental stress without publically disclosing it. In an interview with Arthur G Pais

she states that “All my life in Canada (her home for more than 20 years) I have been aware of the abused woman all around me” (1). Even Deepa Mehta survived a lot of stress in her first marriage with Paul Saltzman, which ended in a bitter divorce. Similarly, Mona was also verbal about her plight and successfully freed herself from the miserable life given to her by her in-laws. It was this bravery and outspoken attitude which stirred Deepa Mehta. A year later Deepa Mehta was asked by Noemi Weis to direct *Lets Talk About It* a documentary about children growing up in abusive households within the immigrant community. Along with a Nigerian and Ecuadorian woman, she wanted to include Mona. Sadly, their budget did not allow for a shoot in Edmonton. However, they did meet another Punjabi woman, Amandeep, whose story was not dissimilar to Mona’s. Both Mona and Amandeep became a source of inspiration for Deepa Mehta. (Arthur. G. Pais)

Around this time, Deepa Mehta again saw *Naga-Mandala* in New Delhi. For her, to interlace both a private story of a young immigrant woman and the parable of the Cobra seemed as an attractive grouping to unearth the nature of duality. This focussed her to make the film *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*.

Videsh- Heaven on Earth is a story of a young Punjabi woman who finds herself abridged to a detested servant and punching bag when she marries into a Brampton family. Chand (Preity Zinta) as a young and beautiful (as Moon {dimpled Moon!}) Punjabi bride leaves for Canada from India. An abusive husband and not-so caring family - The movie travels along the lines of *47 Naatkal* and *Not Without my daughter* i.e. Woman trapped and harassed by her husband, in a foreign country.

The mother (Gick Grewal) advances adieu to her bride-to-be daughter Chand (Preity Zinta) who is flying to Canada to marry her prince charming. She sends her off with a motherly guidance to never take negation from anybody and always give back in full force what you receive. She perhaps had an idea of what miseries lie ahead for Chand in the alien world where her Prince charming, a short tempered taxi driver and Canada a land of maple trees exist. But of course, as naive as Chand is she doesn't heed the words of wisdom.

Chand who is already so traumatized with her doormat like existence, a destitute relationship and a marriage devoid of love, seeks solace in a ballad which reflects her desire and story with references to her current mental state. The recital outstrips her from reality into a world she longs to be in. This is done beautifully and is heartbreaking to hear the rhymes which are not only Chand's asylum but also her cry for help. They make you wonder about the many such suppressed elegies.

She turns to her Jamaican friend Rosa (Yanna McIntosh) who is also a wannabe witch doctor, and gives her some magical roots which assure her husband's undying love. Chand too scared to try them after an unsuccessful first attempt throws out the love potion she intended for her husband, which is imbibed by a cobra lurking nearby.

In Indian mythologies, a cobra is believed to be a creature that can change forms and even turn itself into a human being to avert arrest and in this case, influences another individual. In this state of poetry and ferocity, metaphors take a leap towards physical manifestation in the form of a much docile Rocky. She experiences Rocky at the two extremes - an abusive ruffian and a romantic amorist. Although highly confused, Chand begins to accept this unpredictable nature of her husband without realizing that this may be more than just a case of split personality. Difficult situation arises when the renters in their house mention about Chand being in the bedroom with her husband. This confusion leads Chand to a situation where she has to justify her fidelity. This discloses that, the affection she experienced was only in the reflection of her husband in the Cobra, who loves her profoundly. Towards the end bruised and penniless bride Chand undertakes the *Naagpariksha*, where she holds the cobra in her hand to prove her chastity. In an ironical state, she finally decides to leave this hell which for most of the Indians is heaven on Earth (*Videsh*).

This analysis of the adaptation of Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* into Deepa Mehta's *Videsh- Heaven on Earth* is an enquiry into genres, tone, performance and the medium specific demands and prospectives of a film adaptation inspired from textual and theatrical original text. Like in previous sections, the tools for this analysis draw on Sarah Cardwell's comparative analysis theory, which includes deep reflection of generic context, authorial context and medium-specific context. Further it considers

Gerard Genette's mechanics of narrative, which encompasses, order, duration and frequency, the narrator and point of view.

3. Comparative Analysis

3.a. Generic Context

The word *genre* has an extensive lineage in literary criticism long before the advent of cinema. Hence the precise meaning and uses of this term vary considerably, and it is very hard to spot out one single tenuous school of thought regarding this subject. However, in spite of its indefinite nature it is still part and parcel of every filmic conversation. Richard T. Jameson quotes regarding the all pervasive facet of the expression of genre in Roberto Donati's journal:

Genre isn't a word that pops up in every conversation about films or every review-but the idea is second nature to the movies and our awareness of them. Movies belong to genres much the way people belong to families or ethnic groups. Name one of the classic, bedrock genres- Western, comedy, musical, war film, gangster picture, science fiction, horror- and even the most casual movie goer will come up with a mental image of it, partly visual, partly conceptual("Do Genres in Cinema Really Exist and if so, can they be Defined")

In fact, the history of genre criticism in literature began with Aristotle in his *Poetics*. He was the first to separate the distinctive kinds and discuss their individual performance. Such codification became such a powerful infectious doctrine that every species of literature became subject to it. Accordingly, a similar trend of genre distinction prevails in film studies. Earlier films were plainly classified into tragedy, comedy, romance or a thriller but increased globalizing trends in media environment seeks new approaches to analyse issues like national cinema and genres, authorial visions and style. Relevantly in this context, Hamid Naficy proposes a new individual genre category, that is, transnational cinema. He defines it as "a genre that cuts across

previously defined geographic, national, cultural, cinematic, meta-cinematic boundaries”(qtd in Shohat and Stam 203).

No doubt, global cinema has been a major factor providing impetus to the transnational cinema but another significant reason behind progress of this genre includes worldwide displacement of masses. Thus, Hamid Naficy brought in attention to “a new and critical imagination in the global media: an accented cinema of exile and diaspora and its embedded theory of criticism” (8) in the book entitled *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Through independent transnational cinema, Hamid Naficy combines “the concepts of authorship(the interstitial or exilic film – makers from outside of the West working on the margins of the European and American film industries) with genre(a specific-category of ‘cine-writing’, iconography and self-narrativization linked through themes of memory, desire , loss, longing and nostalgia”(“Phobic spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre” 121). (Higbee and Lim 1-16)

According to a film critic, Asuman Suner, transnational filmmaking practices conduct issues regarding the questions of national identity and belonging. This is done by channelling consideration towards the multiplicity of the experience of displacement, de-territorialization, and migration within and across the non-Western world. Asuman Sunar further quotes that by, “Testifying to the complexity of the question of displacement in their own geopolitical contexts, they effectively prove that the problematization of the relations of belonging and identity is not the monopoly of the exilic/diasporic subjects residing in the West.” (qtd in Tay 112).

Focusing in terms of this research effort, following Hamid Naficy’s thought of independent transnational genre and Asuman Suner’s clarity of transnational filmmaking practices they clearly situate Deepa Mehta’s filmmaking practices as transnational. This line of thought is pursued neither for the reason that Deepa Mehta is herself a diasporic victim nor because of the transnational style of the production, distribution, and reception of her cinema worldwide. It is rather followed because Deepa Mehta’s directorial practices in *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* can be better identified as transnational in terms of the demonstration of cross-cultural subject matter and as

Sharon Lin Tay writes, the movie depicts “complexities of geopolitics, mobilisation, displacement, desires and identity” (114).

Precisely speaking, many particular issues combine to make Deepa Mehta’s work as transnational. To mention a few include: the account of the binary model of global-local; the portrayal of multilayered power relations among different discourses at various levels of social relations such as nationalism, religion, and patriarchy and the critique of “authentic” and static past and tradition. In addition Deepa Mehta’s transnational cinema is mobilised to have other kind of alliances through help of certain agencies that may help to highlight the repression of a certain aspect of identity within the national. These kinds of transnational alliances include identity formations that disregard or challenge customary constructs of the national, such as gender (women and feminist cinema) and sexuality (queer cinema). Accordingly, *Videsh –Heaven on Earth* along with being a prototype of transnational cinema, employs the agency of gender issues to challenge the domineering patriarchal societal values. Through the story of Chand, Deepa Mehta in this transnational display supports as well as forwards feminist concerns.

Videsh- Heaven on Earth has three distinct themes immigration, isolation and the power of the imagination that ultimately enables the protagonist, Chand, to break away from the grim realities of her life. For many, it is a much agreeable thought that moving to a foreign land , for instance Canada in this movie, improves women’s status but this isn’t necessarily so. There are many scenario’s regarding this issue, such as though migration might help some women to escape from deficits in their homeland but unfortunately it also deprives them of the protection that their families offer back home. In India, abusive behaviour might be checked by family members, friends or neighbours but in their adopted homeland these women lack any assistance from family and friends and in many cases they remain totally isolated and therefore vulnerable. Similar circumstances prevail in *Videsh- Heaven on Earth*, where every character is a victim. This victimization is not only because of the nostalgic feeling regarding the cultural baggage which they brought with them to their new home, but also because of the lack of support they receive in a foreign land. There is little or no network that prepares these characters for an alien world, which they can navigate with dignity. This further

raises the issues of imbalanced human identity and lack of bonding for these unhappy immigrants. These are the possible themes understated in context of the transnational genre of Deepa Mehta in *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*

In consideration of the above mentioned discussion the various issues analysed under the generic domain are as under.

Dislocated Diaspora's: Theme of Migration and Identity

Theme of Migration

Before moving on with analyzing the matter of dislocated diasporas in the film, some general information regarding the issue of migration has been probed. Migration is commonly defined in *Oxford Dictionary of English* as, “the action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country”(Aungus n.pag). This issue of migration raises deep human concern throughout human history since the precedent times. From ages men have been travelling all over the globe in search of new avenues and interests. However, presently this level of migration has globally increased for various social, political and economic reasons and this has consequently affected many nations and communities. Slowly and steadily, this issue has interested the eye of many writers and so along with related issues, such as exile, dislocation, displacement, acculturation, up-rootedness and selfhood, have become hot topic in the literature around the world.

Recounting from the pages of Indian history, the action of migration in the past was not always a free-willed decision. During colonial rule many individuals and families migrated unwillingly as bonded labour. While other reasons include amazing successes of Indian rulers who were able to win over faraway lands through war, or through sacred spread of the dominant religious sects in India. Whatever may be the cause for migration, the records of early migrations are very meager and do not disclose fully the mindset, misery, pain and pleasures involved in this whole process.

In the context of modern narratives, migrants very easily tend to share their common experiences in foreign lands. The similarities as well as differences within such experiences are caused by circumstantial issues or by variation in the duration of the stay. In the past five decades, numerous literary works by Indian-born writers have

placed issues connected to immigration at the centre of their narratives. Internationally acclaimed authors like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh or Salman Rushdie, to mention only a few, have drawn attention to the experience of migration and the traumas often associated with leaving one's homeland and coming in contact with another culture. The script of *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* also centres prime issues regarding the subject which includes: However, Sanjukta Dasgupta has pointed out that male migrant writers engage more with concerns regarding 'imaginary homelands' (Rushdie, Ghosh, or Rohinton Mistry) whereas female writers of the diaspora (including Jhumpa Lahiri) focus on the very basic quest for home as a secure, familiar space (82).

The burning issues centring the issue of migration includes:

Diasporic displacement-Malti Agarwal writes that "Immigration proves a pleasant experience only to a few immigrants who succeed in assimilating themselves with new geographical, cultural, social and psychological environment" (V). And for the larger portion, as the general feedbacks disclose, immigration has not been a pleasant experience. This larger segment is the miserable lot and has been termed as diasporas. They refer to a section who does not feel secure and comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as mentioned on their passports. Gay Wilentz writes about the concept of the diaspora culture that, " whenever peoples with shared values, cultural traditions, and racial/ ethnic identity are dispersed into hostile environments, there emerges simultaneously a culture which retains many of the residual traditions while attempting to cope with the alien- and most often dominant- society around them" (365). These diasporic identities are dangerously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; and are haunted by ghosts arising from within that encourage defensive or separatist movements. Vijay Mishra describes them as, "All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way" ("(B)ordering Naipaul: Indenture History and Diasporic Poetics " 189). This miserable lot often find themselves clubbed between two distant cultures and traditions. In a displaced situation and agonizing identity crisis, they have no option instead but to continue living miserably within the dualities and multi-cultures. They suffer pangs of displacement, longing for the return to their roots, feelings of nostalgia and an endless

memory of their homeland. Thus this experience of a painful process of acculturation and adjustment is universal to all who have left their native soil for a foreign land.

Apparently, the movie *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* is no different in the sense that it very relevantly brings out the similar facts from its script, in context of this discussion. Actually, some audience simply mistake this film as yet another story about domestic abuse, but in reality this movie is a nightmarish portrait of diasporic displacement. No doubt, the base line of the script concerns the awful results of arranged marriages and domestic violence but what comes forefront have been issues like immigration, isolation, loneliness and the pain of being far from native land. In an interview with Himanshu Bhagat, Deepa Mehta comments about the very usual story line of the movie:

As Shakespeare said, there are only three stories. It is about the way you tell it. Abuse is universal—irrespective of class, colour or geography—and it takes on different hues in different cultures. *Videsh* looks at abuse in migrant culture. It is a culture of isolation for the first-generation, working-class families. All they come with is their religion, Bollywood and a sense of Indian “family values”. (“*Videsh* is not a Kitchen-sink drama”)

The leading character in the movie is a girl named ,Chand, whose grasp of the English language is modest and whose understanding of Canadian society is even less. Her situation is very much figurative of the general existential crises of immigrants moving westward. A vibrant and lovely girl, she flies from Ludhiana to a small town outside Ontario in Canada to marry a man whom she has never met. Ironically enough, while usually an easy and better life is expected for a person who migrates from India to a foreign land but unfortunately, Chand's new family maintains a poor, miserable lifestyle. The family comprises of seven people, all of them live in a two-bedroom house. Deepa Mehta’s remarkable portrayal of the life of immigrants in the suburbs of Toronto is realistic and precise. This depicts the sad plight of Indians abroad who live in such sub-standard fashion for years just in hope of a better and happy future.

Socially and emotionally these Indian immigrants are puzzled in making choices from the past culture and the present alien society. This double mixed culture stress falls much on the women in comparison to men living abroad. They are simultaneously expected to be traditional housewives who have to be submissive and respectful and along with it they should be modern working women who very well finance their families. No less than a job of a wonder woman is expected from them. Similarly, in the movie *Videsh*, the character of Chand suffers because of such a diplomatic attitude of her family. Immediately after entering the house, without bothering about her exhaustion after such a long journey, she is asked to perform the duties of a traditional Indian house-wife. She is ordered by her mother-in-law to serve beer to her would-be-husband. Even, Rocky, her fiancée has no issues regarding it. This clarifies the inbuilt mentality of immigrant Indians, who though leave their country for better financial status and credits but do not want their women to leave those traditional traits of being an obedient and docile wife. Indian men settled abroad want their wives to join them equally as breadwinners for the family but still they consider them subordinate and inferior as compared to men socially.

After this, Chand without any delay or denial joins Rocky's sister in the napkins factory. The sad part is that she is least acknowledged for her services as her salary is conveniently transferred to her husband. She is seen nowhere in the movie arguing about this with any of the family members. The worst being when she asks Rocky for some money for buying a jacket, she is completely denied. She is even rebuked on taking a leave from the job for ill-health.

Soon Chand becomes a brutally beaten and abused wife who bears the cruelty of Rocky, her husband. Chand's husband is not only indifferent towards her but also is cruel and careless when he beats her. Thus it becomes very easy to hate Rocky and pronounce him as the villain in the story. However, the real masked villain in the story is the circumstances which have made all the characters in the story victims of heavy expectations and responsibilities. Both Rocky and Chand expect to have a better life as immigrants in a rich country. However when Rocky fails to achieve his motives, he takes out his frustration on his wife by beating her. Thus he makes his own as well as his wife's life nothing but a living hell.

Quest for home- As mentioned earlier several writings have been penned down in context of issues regarding migration. But there has been difference in handling of the subject, as Sanjukta Dasgupta has pointed out that male migrant writers engage more with concerns regarding ‘imaginary homelands’ (Rushdie, Ghosh, or Rohinton Mistry) whereas female writers of the diaspora (including Jhumpa Lahiri) focus on the very basic quest for home as a secure, familiar space (82).

In similar fashion, in the movie, the position of Chand explains that though she is married and is living with her husband in his house, which is traditionally regarded as a girl's true home, she is not feeling at home. This explains that while diasporas inevitably become part of the landscape, yet they still experience Martin Heidegger's *Unheimlichkeit*, ‘to-not-be-at-home’ feeling, in conventional German meaning ‘uncanniness’ (Mishra “(B)ordering Naipaul: Indenture History and Diasporic Poetics ” 98). But this is not the case with other characters in the movie, who are making every possible effort to bring more members of their family to Canada. Chand's brothers are indirectly financed by their father abroad through Chand. Basically whereas Canada fails to be home for a diasporic immigrant Chand, is a dream home for many who pine to be or are diasporic immigrants. Thus there are different opinions regarding foreign places designated as true home for immigrant citizens. In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Avtar Brah opines that ‘home’ can be both the place of birth and/or the location of everyday lived experience, thus justifying the idea that what is more significant is the sense of ‘feeling at home’. Hence, Avtar Brah proposes that “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a ‘homeland’. This distinction is least important because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’” (16). She continues to explore the crucial question “Where is home?” and comes to the conclusion that: “On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality”(192). As Paul Gilroy has also posited, the question of home is, thus, “simultaneously about roots and routes” (qtd. in Brah 192).

Above rationalization clarifies that Chand's desire for home is her place of origin (roots), which according to her situation seems a place unachievable. While for other characters their lived experience of their locality is their home (routes). At the same time, this research will point out how some of the characters born in the foreign locale to Indian parents, therefore inhabiting the interstices between cultures, actually have difficulties in reconciling elements from both lifestyles. Their parents migrated in pursuit of the successful dream, choosing to assimilate in order to achieve 'happiness', but for their children things are more complicated and they sometimes find themselves in the impossibility of reconciling their in-betweenness. The little ones in the movie, Harleen and Kabir are examples of such a complex situation. In this situation while Kabir adopts an indifferent attitude to the problems in the family, Harleen, on the other hand becomes an emotional wreck with passing of time.

Although migration is time and again associated with ordeals of separation, dislocation, and relocation (uprooting and making efforts of re-rooting), diasporas are also potentially the site of hope and new beginnings. They become conflicted cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories "collide, reassemble and reconfigure" (Brah 193). Thus, migrants can be at home even away from home. Indeed, in the fantasy of some diasporic members "the double, triple, or multi-placedness of 'home' (...) does not mean that such groups do not feel anchored in the place of settlement" (Brah 193), but, quite on the contrary, it means that "they are at once local and global, inhabiting both imagined and encountered communities" (Brah 196). Moreover, Brah insists that this multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not imply that diasporian subjectivity is 'rootless'. In context with this, besides Chand, all the characters in the movie, Biji, Bhapaji, Aman, Baldev, Roza and even Rocky are hoping for new beginning. They work hard to make a solid hold on this new land and get frustrated only when they fail in their efforts.

Aman and Baldev, sister and brother-in-law of Chand live in the house with their two kids. Baldev is jobless and is a sympathetic character who receives a lot of shameful scorn from everyone for being ideal. Aman, on the other hand works day in and out in the factory to support her family. There is no diasporic pain noticed in these characters but this family is continuously being realised of being a burden in the house

as Indian tradition dictates that sisters after marriage are meant to live in her husband's house. Hence, an implied frustration is seen in Aman , Baldev, Kabir and Harleen who are searching for their own space , which can be in a form of new individual house. In his book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*(2008),Vijay Mishra also reflects on the inherent ambivalence entailed by migration and on the allegorical function of the house. Mishra stresses that immigrants want to possess a residence in order to escape living in a state of perpetual transience, but also in order to re-enact the symbolic rituals of the past. So, he looks at V.S. Naipaul's famous novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and comments:

The failure to find roots, the failure of Biswas actually to build a house on solid foundations – the house that he finally owns and which is heavily mortgaged, the house in which he dies, is as open to the elements as any sieve – this failure is part of the totality of the diasporic experience. The house, the sign that would have transformed the route (the temporariness) into a root (the familiar) is as unsteady as the sailing ships themselves. (...) (*The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* 98)

In the same fashion, Aman and Baldev are toiling to establish a new house in Canada, which they can finally convert into their own home. So their search for home limits to an individual free house in the foreign lands of Canada.

It seems that among all the members of the family, it is only Chand who fails to find home in true sense of the word. Casted by Deepa Mehta, Preity Zinta, gave one of the finest performances of her career which is nothing short of spectacular as the struggling Chand. Heartfelt, nuanced, haunting and heartbreaking, this portrayal does not have a single false note. This role is contrary to Zinta's own image of a strong woman of substance, as well as most of her on-screen roles and she pulls it so convincingly that it's almost impossible to believe it is the same woman who played so many happy-go-lucky characters in previous years. She displays helplessness, fear, despair, and at the same time a certain hope for a better day, with amazing subtlety, depth and pathos. Much of it is internal actually, and all you need to know is in her

eyes. Note the scene where she is looking through the bus window. There's so much pain in her eyes. It really is an outstanding performance. All the other cast members too, do a fine job and provide great support to the main character.



Theme of Identity

Just as Carole Boyce Davies writes:

Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Home sickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. (84)

With time these nostalgic emotions for the love of home along with many other foreign land hindrances stopped acting as roadblocks but started functioning as inspirational factors in terms of the self-identity of immigrants. This act of creating a self, although guided by circumstances, stems from one's willpower in an effort either to bring out the incompatible between the homeland and the foreign land or to make consistent dislocated lives. Stephen Greenblatt argues that there is the irresistible need to uphold the illusion that an individual is the principal maker of his/her own identity: "Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other ... must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked or destroyed" (9). The circumstances and reasons of displacement provide a

basis to define the emotion between an authority and an alien. This finally leads to self-fashioning which is at once a fight for mental adjustment to contest the pangs of physical dislocation and at the same time the physical adjustment to dispel the sense of estrangement and rootlessness. Under such circumstances self-fashioning becomes essentially an act of revolutionary volition.

Instances of similar fashion can be easily traced in literature. Dev and Aditi, two diasporic Indian characters from Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, find themselves in the midst of an unfair and prejudiced English society of the late 1960's. In such a situation, as a self-protective tactic they assert their selves by belonging to diasporic Indian communities. It is not that they do not have Western connections but they like to be in the company of their own ilk. By fitting into such communities they find a wharf to dispel their sense of non-belonging and at the same time they define themselves openly as Indians in the West. They are isolated pockets of Indian culture within Western society and they are completely made up of immigrant Indians who constantly negate any thought of assimilation. Defensive self-fashioning is thus an obstruction to mixing into the host society but it is the natural and defiant retort against hostility, and even more so when a colonial viewpoint is taken. Fawzia Afzal-Khan writes about the colonial encounter in Amit Shankar Saha's article as a "fundamental imbalance" ("The Indian Diaspora and Reading Desai, Mukherjee, Gupta, and Lahiri" 2). It is perhaps this imbalance that obstructs immigrant Indians, even after the Racial Equality Act (1976) and globalization, to identify themselves as British, and instead use weak terminology of having British citizenship.

In the case of Chand, this "fundamental imbalance" works as a silver lining for the dark cloud. Her characterization begins from a very compliant and timid girl bestowed with unfortunate destiny but ends up to be a winner in the foreign land. The horrors which she encountered because of her dwelling in the alien world made her stronger and brave which might have not been expected from her in her homeland. Deepa Mehta has given this character along with unfortunate destiny plenty of bravery and optimism. She suffers, physically, mentally, emotionally and psychologically, yet she never really loses her sense of being. She neither blames anyone nor does she hold

anyone responsible for her miseries, instead, she turns her difficulties into strengths, her fears into valour's by using her imagination. She successfully creates a make believe world that is better than the cold, dry and pitiless foreign land. Thus she builds a Heaven on Earth through her fantasies and imagination. This heaven for Chand is a desire to return home, where her parents live and where she is safe and secure.

As the movie proceeds, it is only Chand who progresses in her personality. This process of identity refashioning in Deepa Mehta's characters is underpinned by Hamid Naficy's theory of border crossing journeys of identity, which, he argues, is evident in "accented" films (films directed/produced by exilic and diasporic people around the world). Accented filmmakers often cross many borders and engage in many deterritorializing and reterritorializing journeys, which take several forms, including home-seeking journeys, journeys of homelessness, and homecoming. But, these journeys are not just physical and geographical but are also deeply psychological and thoughtful. Among the most important are journeys of identity, in the course of which old identities are sometimes discarded and new ones refashioned. In the finest of the accented films, identity is not a rigid essence but a process of becoming, even a performance of identity. Indeed, each accented film may be thought of as a performance of its author's identity. This is because they are highly fluid, exilic and diasporic identities which raise important questions about political agency and about the ethics of identity politics. (*An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*)

In the same fashion, Chand, the leading lady of the film, finally towards the end of the movie, subverts the traditional sexual confines of an Indian woman by leaving the house for good. She does not change or reject completely her gendered identity by being carried away by her dream inspired Naga's love, but rather re-defines and refashions it through a process Hamid Naficy (2001) refers to as a border-crossing journey of identity. The crossing of this border empowers Chand to speak up in front of her husband and her dominating mother-in law.

On the whole, *Heaven on Earth* is an extraordinary, deep and an intelligent piece of work, with an outlook on the social values of the contemporary world. True to her vision, Deepa Mehta has not been biased or one-sided during the entire length of the

movie. Deepa Mehta's scheme of presentation display no heroes or villains in this film but only poignant diasporic victims. They symbolize nothing but silently-screaming puppets on a string being manoeuvred into a life of domesticated dereliction by forces that could be designated as fate or just cruel blows of workaday toil.

The Weak Strings of Human Bonding: Theme of Isolation

Bonding is the formation of a close personal relationship that is used in etymology to describe patterns of friendship, attachment and co-operation. The word 'bond' derives from the 12th century Middle English word *band*, meaning something that binds, ties, or restrains. Its application to interpersonal human relationships has been used intermittently ever since.

In respect of tracing the bonds of interpersonal relationship in Deepa Mehta's *Videsh: Heaven on Earth* but sadly, loneliness and isolation is the pervading idea in this story. Neither, there are any visitors, neighbours, phone-calls, family gatherings or functions and nor any character in the film shows any vibrant desire for human bonding. On the other hand each character is a prototype of self involved lonely caricature.

Beginning with Chand, the leading lady in the movie, gets entrapped by marriage, religion and patriarchy each of which instead of binding her cages her within the joint family household. Set in India and Canada the plot of the film revolves around Chand who goes to Canada as her father arranges her marriage with an Indian there. Bearing a complete indifference from her husband, Chand, all alone in the new alien world finally finds love and assistance only in her whims and fantasies. Her desire for love gets so strong that it comes in the shape of Naga with the body of her husband Rocky. She spends a happy, juvenile time with him and thus for a while experiences some happiness. The Naga helps her finally to break the very oppressive patriarchal structure surrounding her. So it is only in Chand's imagination that audiences are able to see some passion or love otherwise the entire film from beginning to end lacks human bonding or love in every relationship.

This research follows a line of investigation all through the movie to explore the strands of bonding and sharing among different relationships. The film begins with a *sangeet* ceremony in a Punjabi family. Chand is getting married soon and all the ladies

have joined to celebrate this event with dance and merriment. The surrounding seems to be filled with happiness, laughter and giggles as the ladies all dressed up in vibrant colours, dance on Punjabi tunes (*boliyan*). Very young girls and old ladies are shown dancing to the tune of *dholak* and loud clapping, it seems everyone is happy on this alliance and is giving their blessing to Chand for her upcoming future. Deepa Mehta at the very start provides a close view of the *punjabies* and *punjabiat*. The *sangeet* includes all ladies, there are no males in the ceremony and is arranged in a traditional manner on the terrace of the house. There is no music as such just the ladies singing and clapping. All the Punjabi ladies are seen dressed up in traditional attires suit, *phulkari*, *tikkas* and *parandies*. *Boliyan* are the ornament of our mother tongue Punjabi. Punjabi *Boliyan* have been passed for ages from one generation to the next. They are sung in Punjabi households on any occasion that needs celebrating particularly the weddings or birth. The vibrant colour and dance in the scene illustrates life and happiness in a positive way.



The opening scene shows bonding of all ladies in the *sangeet* ceremony who are dancing and singing together. They all have joined to bless Chand for her upcoming married life. Marriage is both a natural institution and a sacred union which is rooted in the divine plan of love. It is natural because man and woman need each other for

survival and sacred because it follows the divine example of Adam and Eve, who united for creating this humanity. Thus guided by love and contentment this relationship is considered as very pious and immortal institution. The Indian concept of marriage is even more conventional in its inception, more than being guided by love it is considered a very pure and chaste tradition. Though marriage is an alliance of man and a woman, it is much more life turning event for a girl as psychologically they involve intensively in dreaming much about happier and contented married life. The audiences can equate similar happiness on Chand's face which easily defines her dreams and longings regarding her marriage. Her 'desire' for a prosperous future is writ large in her eyes. Young and old are shown joining this event and blessing her on this occasion.

Under the cast of such cheerful world of dreams, Chand and her mother are shown dancing enthusiastically to the tunes of the *dholak*. Deepa Mehta holds this scene for a long time, as if impressing on the audience what Chand looks like when she's happy, because soon after her move away from home, her life will turn into an unending litany of sorrow. .

Chand who has grown in a Punjabi family loved to laugh and dreamt of freedom. On the next morning of the *sangeet* Chand is shown sleeping cozily in her blanket and Rocky's photo is seen lying by the side of her bed. Her mother wants to have a word with her before her father and brother wake up, which shows no freedom of conversation for females. A very close bonding of a mother and daughter is shown where the mother (Gick Grewal) bids farewell to her bride-to-be daughter with a word of advice to use her strength whenever needed in case of trouble and she does this by giving an example of the story of Saint Gulab Singh and *Sheshnag*. As a typical traditional Indian mother she gives an advice of patience and tolerance to her daughter. She perhaps had an idea of what miseries lie ahead for Chand in the alien world where her prince charming is a short tempered taxi driver and Canada a land of maple trees. As naive as Chand is she does realize the worries of her mother but doesn't heed the words of wisdom.

Then Chand is shown meeting her new family on the airport in Canada. Her new family includes her husband Rocky, mother in law, father in law, sister in law, Aman,

brother-in-law Baldev and their two kids, Loveleen and Kabir. All seems very happy on her arrival and greet her pleasantly.



But very soon, Chand realizes that her new home is nothing but a pigeon-hole where the entire extended family resides along with Rocky's married sister, her husband and two children. Deepa Mehta scores in establishing credible characters of the Canadian Punjabi family with members that are neither sugar-sweet nor melodramatically bitter. Chand's sister-in-law Aman (Ramanjit Kaur) is married to an unemployed useless man who might forget everything but doesn't avoid getting physical with his wife at night.

It is easy to decipher from Deepa Mehta's portrayal that one of the villains in *Heaven on Earth* is Rocky's mother, who appears to be jealous of her son's new wife and on several occasions goads him into beating her. While there are many jokes thrown around about the contentious relationship between an Indian mother-in-law and wife, this element of Mehta's film reflects the lack of support that an abused woman may receive from her family and community. It also mirrors the lack of support Rocky receives in bearing the responsibility of being the eldest son, who must not only provide for his family in Canada, but also work to ensure his extended family can eventually join them. When the pressure becomes too much, he takes out his frustration on Chand.

The Guardian published comments of Kelly Valen, author of *The Twisted Sisterhood* about women being their own worst enemies “They have correctly identified that the primary threat to [their] emotional security radiates ... from fellow females.” She furthers her thoughts by saying, “a distinct undercurrent of meanness and negativity is plaguing our gender”(qtd in Hill “Women are their own worst enemies, study finds”). This is very true in the case of Rocky’s insecure mother who is unable to tolerate the idea of her young son getting intimidated by beautiful Chand and hence she leaves no chance to provoke Rocky against Chand which leads to physical violence.



On the couple’s wedding night at Niagara Falls, Rocky’s mother appears at the hotel room door. She had a vision that something bad had happened to her son. Rocky tells Chand that the mother will share the bed with her while he and his brother-in-law will sleep in the car. Chand suggests that they simply get another room. Rocky’s response is to slap her across the face, and he makes it clear that her suggestions are not welcome. The mother-in-law does not intervene, nor is she shocked at Rocky’s reaction. At many other instances also Chand’s mother in law provokes him against her.

Chand’s bonding with Aman her sister in law has been shown with varied colours. Aman (Ramanjit Kaur) lives along with her unemployed husband with her parents. At Chand’s arrival she is shown singing traditional Punjabi songs and taunting Chand on her first night with Rocky. She is shown helping and being sympathetic

towards Chand and offers Chand pain-relief medicine (*Tenolol*) when she is beaten by Rocky. She asks Chand if she had foundation to cover her bruises but as she realizes that her husband and she herself are burden on the family so she doesn't intervene in the fights. However at times she is shown playful with her words. When Rocky asks where Chand is, she mentions her being busy scenting herself. This gesture of her provokes Rocky's anger. In another part she covers her brother's fault and asks Chand not to misjudge Rocky. The character of Aman shows variety of feelings but it seems the cold weather of Canada has acted on her nerves to do or say anything.

Thus Chand's bonding with all the characters in the film shows none of the free sharing, love or care. Her mother does show her concerns for her when she guides her with the parental talk before going to Canada but one still wonders how a mother gets ready to send her daughter to a foreign land with no knowledge about her daughter's in laws family. She says easily and calmly that Chand's father and brother have decided this and thus she easily frees herself from the duty of her daughter's future. During Chand's stay in Canada she tries many times to speak to her mother but there is no instance of her mother calling her which seems very strange. For a mother whose daughter has gone to a foreign land for marriage showing no concern to know her well being is unacceptable. Other ladies in the film are also shown equally naïve to something called bonding. Chand's mother- in- law is mean and feisty, and her sister- in- law is in no position to help her.

Hope comes in the form of Rosa (Yanna McIntosh), a tough and savvy Jamaican woman who works alongside Chand in a factory where immigrant women from all over the world clean and press dirty hotel laundry. Rosa sees through the make-up that covers Chand's bruised face. Realizing Chand has nowhere to turn; Rosa gives her a magical root advising her to put it in whatever her husband drinks. The root is supposed to seduce the one who takes it, making them fall hopelessly in love with the person who gives it to them. Chand's attempts with the magic root lead to surreal incidents and her life gradually begins to mirror an Indian fable involving a King Cobra.

Plight of Men-No one feels the pressure more than Rocky, weighed down by familial obligations. A controlling mother who can't let him go, a sweet but ineffectual father,

and a sister whose two children and unemployed husband are also a burden, all live with Rocky and Chand in a two-bedroom house in the suburbs of Toronto. To make matters worse, Rocky is expected to find the money to bring his rest of the extended family to Canada. Unable to express his anger, he finds other ways to release it and it's Chand who bears the brunt of his repressed rage.

Familial obligation and the passive abuse that Indian men endure from in-laws is demonstrated in Mehta's character, Baldev. Rocky's domination of the household is juxtaposed by the impotence of this brother-in-law, who suffers a different, though equally stressful burden of responsibility. The unemployed, job-seeking Baldev is subjected to constant shaming by Rocky's parents for having to live off of his wife's family, which is thought to be the epitome of failure as a husband and father. Because of this indignity, he and his wife feel they cannot intervene in the abuse, and must endure the toll they see it taking on their own adolescent son and daughter.

The father (Rajinder Cheema) seems to be spineless character with having no hold in family matters. His grandson, for no reason given, flushes the old man's teeth down the toilet, an action which conveys the father-in-law's toothlessness in the family dynamic.

So the bonding shown within the characters exists at a very superficial level. No one makes a sincere effort to improve one's own position or the other. Rocky instead of being a hard worker himself depends on the money sent to him by his father in law in the wake of dowry. He without his wife's knowledge receives her salary but gives her an impression of she being a burden. Chand, for very long in the film does nothing to escape from her horrible situation. It is her fantasy ridden Naga which helps her to bring a change in her situation. Aman and her husband live disrespectful lives but none makes an effort to change it. They just show emotions of remorse or regret on their faces when taunted regarding the fact but with no actions. In addition to personal bonding, there are no outsiders or visitors, no neighbours, no phone-calls and no family gatherings or functions. It seems, even the Indians living abroad have been infected by the indifferent attitude of the foreign community that none seems any sensitive to the sad plight of other individual. Quintessentially, there is much difference regarded between Indian and

a Canadian or any other foreign society concerning associating behaviour. In contrast to Indian communities in which people feel the responsibility to take part in the lives of others, foreigners and in this case Canadians, are careful not to intrude in their neighbours business. So, none of the foreigners are seen talking or interacting with any characters in the film. It is only a black woman, who herself is a diasporic immigrant who forwards her help to Chand. Hence, very sadly one feels after analyzing the characters of the movie that even the Indians living abroad have been tainted by the indifferent attitude of the foreign community. Maybe, if Chand by any how lived in such a community a little more she would have herself turned into a similar heartless and cold human being. Thus, honestly, as mentioned in the beginning loneliness and isolation spreads through the entire narrative of *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*.

3.b. Authorial Context

Directing a film for Deepa Mehta is nothing short of than going on an exploration. Every aspect of this exploration is equally interesting for her: whether it is in terms of unravelling a set of circumstances or it is examining the psychology underneath them. Basically when she opts to direct a film it is because everything about narrating that particular story and its subject matter enthrals her passionately. Spotlighting the significant trend in her subjects, it has always been feminist portrayal. Irrespective of issues concerning nationality, Indian females and their depressing issues have always gained her sympathetic attention. In a magazine, Ashley McAllistor quotes Deepa Mehta when she says, “Curiosity is what motivates me generally, curiosity about the oppression of women in particular” (“Adventures in Feministory: Deepa Mehta”). Her aim has always been to deconstruct the myth regarding the ideal woman in the heterosexual perspective and to offer an insight into woman outside the relational male. In performing such a task, many of her films like her famous trilogy *Fire, Earth* and *Water*, intensifies the dysfunctionality to such an extent that it has in many cases ended up in offending the audience. Despite this negativity, she continued her mission of empowering women by challenging the patriarchy within the culture.

Continuing with her creed of women-centred narratives, *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* follows the set league. The story, because of its oppressive nature, sympathize the

sad plight of Indian women caught in the traditional web of joint families and arranged marriages. The subject matter of the movie gained her attention when she first saw the theatrical adaptation of *Naga-Mandala* by Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry in New Delhi in 1989. It was since then that the plot of the story about a strange union of fantasy and reality impressed her and she decided to adapt the story into a movie. Whereas, Deepa Mehta took almost a year to complete the script of the movie, she only took six months to complete the actual process of filming. Just like her many other movies, *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* is also, no doubt a feminist portrayal. It is a story of an unhappy bride, Chand, who fills her loneliness by conjuring up fantasies, dreams and illusions to give meaning to her empty life. As the story proceeds, these illusions get a life of their own and start functioning independently for her.

The family of Chand in Brampton represent a very typical working class immigrant family in Canada which could be from any community. But the reason Deepa Mehta focused on a Punjabi family was, primarily, because Deepa Mehta herself is a Punjabi and grew up in Amritsar, speaking the language. Naturally it helped Deepa Mehta to be more authentic and real. In addition to it, Neelam Mansingh's Punjabi theatrical adaptation of the play impressed Deepa Mehta to the heights. And finally the women Deepa Mehta read about and met in context of this story were all belonging to this community. All of them generously narrated of their varied experiences. All these reasons acted heavily upon Deepa Mehta and finally collaborated to attempt this directorial. Deepa Mehta owes a big thanks to her researcher and friend, Nep Siddhu, by whose help she met families in the suburbs of Toronto, from whom she could draw upon to do the film. So, every small detail of the film is rooted in reality: from characters to the rituals to the themes and the setting.

Undeniably feminist, Deepa Mehta while routing through realistic themes like immigration, isolation and imagination through the narrative, finally arrives at the issue of physical abuse. It is dislocation, emotional stress and isolation that piles up in frustration and leads to physical abuse. Further, physical torture and strain finally triggers the imagination process. Similarly, in Chand's case not only did she suffer physical abuse but ultimately found suitable tool in her fancies countering the pain associated with it. Not only was it difficult to direct such 'abuse' scenes in the film but

it was more challenging for Deepa Mehta to sustain that tension throughout. These nerve wrecking scenes are nothing less than instances in a thriller movie.

Thus evidently, Deepa Mehta always tries to situate feminist perspective in depicting other associated themes and subjects. The whole set up of the movie centres upon highlighting the issues concerned. In this regards it is highly essential to study the marginalised and undesirable women of Deepa Mehta, which becomes an essential part of her movies.

Marginalized by Domesticity and Male Chauvinism: The Dislocated Women of Deepa Mehta

Hindu themes are very common in movies which are from and about India; however, the approach to Hinduism depicted in these films varies. On the one hand, we have numerous examples of films that seek to assert traditional Hindu values and naturally contain little critique. For instance, there is a long history of Indian devotional and mythological films that glorify and elevate Hindu gods and associated norms. In addition, recent Hindu nationalists have been proficient at making use of film and other audio-visual media to further propagate their often traditionalist view of Indian cultural and pious character. On the other hand, recently cinema audiences are witnessing important examples of films that defy aspects of Hinduism in a revisionist spirit. Issues' regarding degradation of women at the hands of conservative Hindu norms is one major trend among such filmmakers. Harassed or murdered wives or women constitute a major theme in such Indian filmography. These stories are set either in urban low-middle class (*Fire*, 1996), in the Bombay urbanite milieu (*Bhoot*, 2003) or in the expatriate experience (*Provoked*, 2006; *Videsh- Heaven on Earth*, 2008).

Belonging to the latter strand of cinema, Deepa Mehta is no doubt a significant example of globalized filmmaking. Her works are powerful indictments of patriarchal Hindu attitude, towards women and sexuality, in need of serious reform. Her activism in this field has been met with hostility from conservative Hindus and her works have been wrongly relegated as Orientalist misinterpretations. However, none of these negative reviews dishearten Deepa Mehta and her works continues to be examples of revolutionary protest in the face of male hegemony of Hindu culture and thus

proclaiming women empowerment. There are also fascinating parallels between Deepa Mehta's films and *Devi* (The Goddess, 1960), directed by the Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray, that investigates the plight of a young woman in a patriarchal Hindu family in the nineteenth century. Although *Devi* is a much older film but citing its relation to Deepa Mehta's work is not arbitrary; Deepa Mehta has herself cited Satyajit Ray as the director whom she most admired and who has had the biggest influence on her films. She describes him as "the greatest humanist filmmaker" and expresses a desire to "reach his vision to some level." (qtd in Banning and Levitin 284). (David . F. Burton 1-17)

Actually, in addition to being guided by personal sad experiences, the other reason for dealing with such grave subjects is that Deepa Mehta is very much familiar with the history of Punjab. So this initiates her to take up these subjects and narrate these little known stories of women who suffered at the hands of the adverse situations. Mehta's films portray women against different backdrops-in violence-torn historical moments, in the humdrum domestic arena, as also in the specific socio-temporal framework of a rigid society. Not simply sociological surveys, they cut across different disciplines like history, politics, literature, media, elitist and mass culture. Mehta deals with the victimization and oppression of women at the hands of power-brokers, and the price women have to pay at all times, during political turmoil and even in times of peace. A controversial figure ever since her film *Fire* was banned in India in late 1998 for its explicit portrayal of lesbianism, Mehta's subsequent film *1947 Earth* (1999) which is based on Bapsi Sadhwas's *Ice Candy-Man* (1988), speaks of the Partition of India and how it affected the lives of women during those years of violence. The third film of the trilogy, *Water*, again ran into trouble, arousing the ire of Hindu Fundamentalists when she tried to focus on the shabby treatment meted out to widows by the traditional Hindu society. The film had to be abandoned and was later moved to a more congenial locale and shot in secrecy. In 2005 it was finally released in a package totally different from the original. Recognition and accolades followed: at the eighth International Indian Film Academy Awards, Deepa Mehta's was adjudged the most Outstanding Achievement by an Indian in International Cinema. Thus, progressing with such a strong passion for women empowerment, her works centres upon the female

body, with the ways in which radical and traumatic displacements influence women, leaving permanent marks on their bodies

Deepa Mehta's *Heaven on Earth* is no different and provides a sad portrayal of yet another diasporic displaced female body as a victim of male chauvinism. It is very sad that even today, the socially approved female role models in India are legendary women like Sita in *Ramayan* (who dutifully accompanied her husband into exile), Draupadi in the *The Mahabharata* (who, without a protest, accepted her position as the wife of the five Pandavas), Gandhari in the same epic (who showed loyalty to her blind husband by opting for a blind folded life), Savitri (who argued with Yamraj, the God of Death, and brought her husband, Satvakama, back to life), or the poet-saint Mirabai who renounced the world and dedicated her whole life to singing songs in praise of Lord Krishna.

Most of the Indian community still unfortunately believes in ancient Hindu traditions which directs that the wife is literally a husband's property and she must display this ownership to the world through certain symbols on her physical self: for instance, the *mangalsutra*, the *red bangels* on her wrists, rings on her toes/nose, vermilion (*sindoor*) in the hair and the *bindi* on the forehead. These hallmarks of her position as a wife may vary from one state/community to the other but they still exist and are religiously followed in most families. Further, there are certain rituals and festivals dedicated to the husband who is treated as a demi-god; for instance, the *Karva chauth*, when the wife must undertake a strict fast once a year, on a particular day of the lunar calendar remain without food and water all day and pray for the long life at her spouse. Incidentally, Hindu tradition does not cite any such rituals for husbands to display their respect towards the wife. In the days gone by, a very horrible and shameful institution of *Sati* was also prevalent in India according to which if the woman is unlucky enough to survive more than her husband, it was best for her to commit *Sati* by burning herself on her husband's dead body. (Manju Jaidka 20-23)

The point to emphasize is that women in India, according to the orthodox belief, are a disadvantaged lot caught in the shackles of tradition. They occupy a position inferior to men; their lives are considered to be having just only one duty, which is to

satisfy the whims of her husband and his family. Manju Jaidka comments regarding these orthodox beliefs that, “Such beliefs are deeply ingrained in Indian society where women have silently coped with domestic violence, an incorrigible son-fixation, dowry death, female feticides and infanticides”(23).

In such a situation where the display of veneration for husband is so much admirable, it was but natural for the women centric portrayals of Deepa Mehta to receive hostile reaction by conventionalists. Sadly enough, these archaic surroundings further compel these reactionary renderings to pass through tough ordeals to prove their innocence. Much similar, the character of Chand, a young bride in the *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*, too passes through a trial to prove her innocence. In a way very reminiscent of the poem ‘Art of Pariahs’ by Meena Alexandra, in the movie, the protagonist, Chand, is trapped in a claustrophobic environment: her husband’s house in Toronto (like Meena Alexander’s Draupadi stands by the kitchen stove). Chand, who reached Canada after her arranged marriage which was arranged by her father, experiences what Meena Alexander would mention as ‘the shock of arrival’. She is overwrought to face the cruel realities of the foreign land which ultimately tramples her expectations of a superior life in Canada with her husband’s family. Her husband is in fact cruel and unconcerned towards her, maybe due to his personal crisis of identity as an Indian-Canadian who has been forced to bear the responsibility of a huge family and now in addition has to accept an arranged marriage. Chand’s in-laws, annoyed with their own scarcity of funds, abuse her, making her life rather more depressing. (Stefnia Basset 1-8)

Sad and unhappy Chand, longs for the gentle touch of her husband in the film. From the very beginning, her rapport with her husband Rocky has been very detached and emotionless. They meet for the first time on the airport and after a day or two get married. All during this time Rocky makes no effort to communicate to his wife. On the very first night after marriage, he coldly passes the statement that they are not going to have any sex. Further to this he doesn’t engage in any closeness with his new wife. According to their plan, they leave for their honeymoon on the next day but their togetherness in the car creates no curiosity or longing within Rocky for his new wife. He neither tries to touch her nor openly talk to her. He just mentions honeymoon to Chand and gives a weird smile to Chand who knows its meaning. It seems that for

Rocky, Chand is only his wife in terms of having sex on the honeymoon and nothing more. The couple is far away from love and reciprocation and continues to remain formal with each other.

During their trip, they stop to visit the Niagara Falls and Chand demonstrates her excitement and wishes to capture a picture there as a remembrance of their honeymoon but for Rocky all this is too touristy. Further continuing with his careless and insensitive attitude, after reaching the room he asks Chand to take off her clothes. This behaviour seems very strange on Rocky's part because he makes no effort to communicate or bond with Chand and just wants to get physical with her. It seems that like an old-fashioned typical Indian men he wants his relation with his wife only at physical level and wants none of the sensitivity and respect to be displayed in this relationship.

Very soon, Rocky's mother, Biji, arrives there with very illogical reasons and further makes the matter worse for the couple. Chand's concerned suggestion of hiring another room for Biji is greeted with irrelevant slapping of Rocky. Thus a downward and distressful journey of this relationship begins. Sorrowfully, Chand doesn't even possess the money to make a call to her mother back home to confess about her sad plight. It is not surprising that, in a weak moment, she scribbles her name and address (in India) on a washroom wall in a gas station, as if willing herself to remember an identity that's gradually being eroded by her strange new life.



After the episode of Rocky slapping Chand in their honeymoon hotel room, it becomes a frequent affair for Rocky to torture Chand physically. Physical violence, except when forced by self defence is one of the most cowardly acts that human beings wilfully engage in. For many, power over another is as vital to the ego/sense-of-worth as food is to the body/sense-of-sustenance. Perhaps the most horrific form of abuse comes from a spouse who is so desperate that, his astonished at first partner, unwittingly morphs into the punching bag of self-esteem. Surprising to many (usually those on the outside of these truly miserable relationships) is the length of time required before the victim seeks help.

Chand bears this turmoil for long till her patience runs out. Actually, from ages the voice of Indian women is unheard and controlled by masculine and patriarchal sanctioned dictates whether individual or collective. In case of Chand, she is married in a foreign country to an unknown person on the dictates of her father; her will is inactive in this decision. Her father sends twenty thousand dollars in cash to Rocky on this alliance, which can be considered as a dowry or commission for making his daughter a resident of Canada, which will further help other immigrants. She goes to Canada with rosy dreams of a happy future but is welcomed by a loveless, brutal and frustrated husband and an uncaring family. Her requests of phone call to India are negated and avoided postponing it on tomorrow (*kal*).

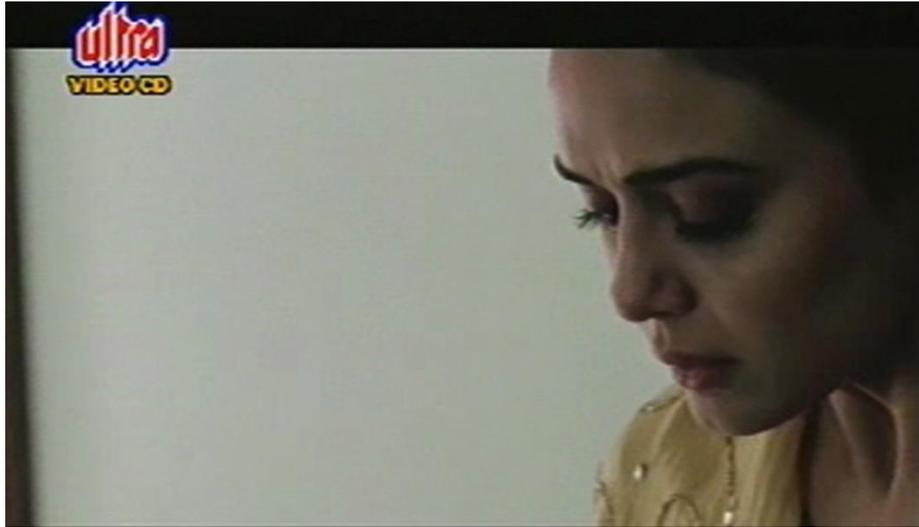


Chand claims of being more educated for a reputed job but is made fun by her sister in law and thus with no option she does a menial job just as her sister-in-law.



Her salary is sent to her husband without her knowledge. She is insulted by her mother- in- law for not making a round *roti* and further brutally tortured by her husband on his mother instigation. On the honeymoon night when she suggests of renting another room when the mother of Rocky gives an unexpected visit, she receives a slap

which shudder her soul to misery. Thus like many typical Indian women, Chand's existence as a person is mutilated badly by one and all in the family.



At this point audience expect that *Videsh* is predictably poised enough to take off into the realm of self-empowerment drama. One recall's Chand's mother advising her to use her strength (“*Apni taaqat zaroor istemal karna*”), and she also becomes aware about dialing 911 in case of emergencies. Further, given Deepa Mehta's predilection for posting placards through her screenplays, audience expect the hitherto tranquil and calm film to evolve into a fiery feminist manifesto. But *Videsh*, unexpectedly, turns even quieter and distressing. There are no cops in the picture, no helpful divorced women who know a thing or two about domestic violence and are therefore able to rouse Chand into action against her predicament. It is instead, a story about how help can come, sometimes, from the most unexpected quarters, even without one's realizing it, if one wants it badly enough.

Finally, Chand after being dead tired of this torturous life finds ultimate resort in her imagination. She in order to escape from her distressing stance begins to imagine an alternative life with a loving husband, creating a clash between reality and imagination, so much that she is no longer able to tell them apart. Deepa Mehta conjures up a snake in North America, in a form very suggestive of the technique of magic realism. Stefnia Basset while comparing this technique with Meena Alexander's work ‘Art of Pariahs’ writes, “In a sense, it is the same process adopted by Meena Alexander when she builds

her palimpsests of place: India superimposes on Canada, something not at all uncommon in diasporic literature but still unusual in mainstream cinema, which is often bound to realism and linear narratives.”(6) The Indian snake which appears by magic in the family’s garden in Canada and Chand’s hallucinations are the result of her double shock: that of having been forced to relocate from Punjab to Canada and that of having been displaced from her family to her in-laws. It is a shock of arrival which involves the dislocated woman in both her conjoined identities. (Stefnia Basset 1-8)

Basically, the mention of the *Sheshnag* in the very beginning of the movie refers to its upcoming mythical significance. Chand’s mother must have narrated the story of the Saint and the *Sheshnag* to her daughter several times in her childhood which thus had become a part of her psychology. As religion and mythology is of utmost important for Indians, this story of *Sheshnag* and its message that the snake should not bite, but that doesn’t mean it can’t hiss for protection is valued by both mother and daughter. The irony of the situation is that it is the *Sheshnag* who will come to liberate her from her pain. Usage of symbols is very common in the films of Deepa Mehta and the snake is a dominant symbol in Indian Mythology and Hinduism. The snake (*Nag*) is worshipped by people across the country and is considered to be a protector and a savior.

The picture of Indian God Lord *Shiva* is incomplete without the Cobra around his neck (pictured left). Another Indian God, Lord *Vishnu*, rests on a seven headed snake. There are hundreds of references to snakes with mythical powers in Indian stories. These have made the snake a powerful symbol in Indian Culture.

Similarly, in the story of Chand, Naga plays the role of a protector for Chand. He helps her to forget her pain and talk about her family and her own self. She gains a respect as a person in his company. Chand and Naga through their emotional and physical union transgress the social discourse that entraps them. As Jasbir Jain puts it “an act of transgression breaks the control of others over the body and compels society to reformulate its boundaries in whatever limited measures” (136). Chand and Naga do not sweep aside the existing order by escaping from it but rather they assert their own discourse of desire and longing. They create their own happy space of love and fulfilment where no one else is wanted.

Towards the end, the trial by fire that Chand has to pass requires pulling the snake out of its hole to prove her purity, since her husband has caught her speaking with her imaginary husband. She is resorting to a myth that is familiar to her in order to conjure up her salvation. Like Chand, who has immigrated to Canada, in the epic tale of Sita, she was asked to prove her innocence through an ordeal by fire. As a diasporic subject, Chand, standing on the soil of Canada still reminds about these mythical ventures belonging to Indian mythical past. As Stuart Hall wrote about the diasporic subject, “[t]he past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it [...] is always-already ‘after the break’. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (qtd in Rutherford 226). Finally, Chand leaves for good and thus releases herself from her unending tortures life. This ending seems a little disappointing, mostly when the audiences are aware of being watching a Deepa Mehta’s direction. In contrast to Girish Karnad or Neelam Mansingh’s feminist uprising in their scripts by evolving Rani as a Goddess, Deepa Mehta is far too short is evolving the character of Chand.

It seems, Deepa Mehta, who before *Heaven on Earth* was praised for her realism, takes on magical realism, thus showing her understanding of and closeness to Salman Rushdie’s way of addressing transnational and dislocated identities. Finally concluding, there is no doubt that cinema audience’s eye not powerful but surrealistic feminism in Deepa Mehta’s *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*. Actually, feminism one way or the other stands true in case of all the directions by Deepa Mehta, who may situate a sensitive romantic plot or sub-plot, but do not forget to provide commanding agency to the central female characters. This is unlike most Bollywood cinema, which, even in its contemporary guise, limits the aspirations of women to the private sphere (Malhotra and Alagh, 2004: 30). While characters like Radha in *Fire*, Shanta in *Earth*, Kalyani in *Water* and Chand in *Videsh* come across as subaltern in the sense of being victimised by dominant patriarchal ideology, they are depicted in alliance with younger and more resistant characters like Sita, Lenny, Chuyia and Loveleen, respectively who act as catalysts for change. So, though Deepa Mehta’s leading ladies maybe in trouble she does not fail to provide a positive futuristic relay for reform through younger but again

female characters. Thus, she successfully creates new female narratives of being and becoming, of renewing and reclaiming.

3.c. Film Context (Medium-Specificity)

It is very true that of all the art forms, filmmaking is the most difficult and expensive project. Along with being unique, the art of filmmaking is a highly challenging, precisely because it requires a collaborative creative process. A variety of professionals and craft-heads join their hands together to make a successful film. Expertise of light, sound, technology, design, construction and many other fields, team up for its completion. In the process of filmmaking, more than individual input, the collaborative effort of many brings fruitful result. The vision of director is rightly portrayed on the movie screen by many creative heads joining hands together.

It is the director, who solely heads this large budget collaboration and it is his vision according to which the choices and selections are made to enliven the script from page to screen. It depends on the director's wisdom how he single-handedly delineates all the departments together to carry forward this project. In Michael Berry Book *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers*, Ang lee comments regarding the criteria of film shooting:

I always compare filmmaking to cooking. Shooting is like buying the groceries. You buy all kinds of ingredients and the better ingredients you get, the better chance you have of making the movie you want. (2)

Centering attention upon the filmmaking process of Deepa Mehta's *Vidush-Heaven on Earth*, it was shot in thirty days in extremely cold weather of minus twenty degrees in Canada. The cast and the crew were shivering throughout the shoot. The last scene of the film was shot over three days because the weather fluctuated between those deadly clear days of winter and unexpected blizzards. In the course of procedure to analyse the filmmaking, information about the cast and crew is the first basic step undertaken.

Cast and Characters

Chand-The protagonist in the film, Chand, is played by a leading Bollywood star Preity Zinta. Mostly she has been seen in bubbly and cool enthusiastic roles in her Bollywood commercial movies. But, her characterization in this movie is completely opposite, where she plays the role of a sad and miserable diasporic immigrant who suffers mentally and emotionally at the hands of her husband as well as her in-laws. Actually, the reason behind Deepa Mehta casting Preity Zinta for this role goes far back in memory. It was when Deepa Mehta first met Preity Zinta in England and immediately her transparency as a person really struck a chord in her and she impulsively decided to cast Preity Zinta as Chand. Deepa Mehta knew within the span of ten minutes that Preity Zinta would be perfect in the role of Chand.

As a person, Preity Zinta is smart, sincere, bold, and bears no egoism considering her marquee status. Luckily, when deciding to join in Deepa Mehta's venture, she was at a point in her career where she wanted to perform daring and experimental roles. Her filmy career already comprised of many Bollywood commercials and so *Videsh*, was a great opportunity for her to prove her versatility. So guided with such strong inspiration and along with bearing an excellent professional and extremely diligent persona, Preity proved her worth in this role. Having an academic background in psychology she wrote many notes about the script and had a volley of questions regarding her character and motivation. No doubt to play Chand was all consuming for Preity Zinta but she worked her bones off to give her role authenticity, and this included learning Punjabi language and culture.

Biji-The role of Biji, Chand's mother-in-law, is convincingly played by award winning film, stage and actress, Balinder Johal. Her character in the movie is emblematic of the victim becoming the victimizer and a woman taking on the job of the abusive patriarchy. Balinder Johal seriously proved her mettle professionally and physically during the shooting of the film. Deepa Mehta comments about this, "We did seven takes of the shot where Balinder is pushed to the kitchen floor by Preity. It was only after I had OK'd the final shot that, Balinder admitted that her wrists were weak."(qtd in Dercksen "The Art of World Cinema *Heaven on Earth*")

Born and brought up in India, Balinder Johal is adept in many languages, as in, Hindi, English, Punjabi and Urdu which she successfully utilised in many Hollywood and Canadian shows, movies and educational videos. *Videsh* was a challenging project for her because she knew Deepa Mehta would want nothing but the best from her cast. In this regard, she did prove her skills in acting out a dominating and an orthodox mother-in-law. Her best came out when she would do improvisation. She improvised all the dialogues between her and Papaji in the scenes shot in the mall. She was so easy with her role that Deepa Mehta didn't have to do any extra job with her performance.

Rocky- The role of Rocky, Chand's husband is performed by the same actor who played *Kesho* in Neelam Mansingh's theatrical adaptation of *Naga-Mandala* in Punjabi. Deepa Mehta first met Vansh Bhardwaj in Delhi while he was performing in Neelam Mansingh's theatrical performance of *Naga-Mandala*. The talent, focus and precision which Vansh Bhardwaj brought to the role really touched Deepa Mehta and she was sure of considering him for the part of Rocky.

In spite of being a theatre artist, Vansh Bhardwaj worked as a through professional in the role of Rocky in his first film *Heaven on Earth*. He completely matched the acting capabilities of Priety Zinta and never once did get intimidated by the fact of her being a big Bollywood star. The discipline that Vansh Bhardwaj had gained while working with Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry held him in good stead and Preity was exceedingly liberal in sharing the 'film language' which she had garnered over the years with Vansh Bhardwaj.

Bhapaji- The role of Bhapaji, Chand's father-in-law is convincingly performed by Rajinder Singh Cheema from Vancouver. He is given the role of a kind but incompetent patriarch of the household who fails to dominate his existence on the family members. Rajinder Singh Cheema proved his worth in this role which demanded effective steadiness and calmness. As a seasoned artist of his times, he brought impressive dignity to the role and gave his full energy and steadiness in maintaining a balance in his gestures and body movement.

Baldev- The role of Baldev, Chand's brother-in-law is performed by Gourrav Sihan, a new actor and a performer. It was hard for Deepa Mehta to find the cast for Baldev-- the

son-in-law who is reliant on his wife's family and not having much luck. She needed an actor who along with knowing Punjabi should also be skilled a performer, which was no less than a big challenge. Then Deepa Mehta met Gourrav in one of the auditions and found him to be perfect for this role. Though there is a very little role of Gourrav Sihan in the film but he adequately portrays the role of a beaten son-in-law who tries to put up a brave face and keeps his dignity intact without rocking the boat. More than his acting there are these 'quick looks' that Gourrav Sihan gives to people that take in the situation at hand and then ignore it.

Aman-The role of Aman, Chand's sister-in-law and Baldev's wife is performed by yet another theatre artist, Ramanjit Kaur. She is Rocky's sister and mother to two children, Kabir and Loveleen. Ramanjit Kaur is one among the timeless seasoned artists belonging to Neelam Mansingh repository of The Company. She performs the leading roles in almost every play of Neelam Mansingh and in *Naga-Mandala* she plays the role of Rani, the protagonist.

For *Videsh*, Deepa Mehta already had an eye upon Ramanjit because she knew her for years and apart from this Deepa Mehta had been witness to her long successful career. Ramanjit plays the role of Aman, a woman who is defined more through her relationships rather than her own individual identity. With Ramanjit as Aman, she brilliantly shines in her utmost natural and perfect performance. Ramanjit, a versatile actor par excellence is known for being a storehouse of Punjabi songs and almost all the folk songs sung in the movie is her contribution.

Rosa- The role of Rosa, Chand's Jamaican friend, turned out to be the most difficult role to cast for Deepa Mehta. The casting for this role was so difficult because not only this role demanded a fine actor but also one that could physically pull off being 'magical' in a rather mundane environment; to be mystical yet rooted in reality. Auditions were set for this role and finally Yanna was selected for this role. Rosa is Jamaican-Canadian friend of Chand from her work, personifying typical magical sorceress who helps others in some magical sinister way and Yanna appropriately brought a non-stereotypical presence to her. She imbued Rosa's character with compassion without ever resorting to sentimentality. The bonding between her and

Chand is used to highlight the cross-ethnic allegiances that develop up between women in similar circumstances.

Kabir- The role of Kabir, Chand's nephew is performed by Orville Maciel. Deepa Mehta was very much impressed by Orville Maciel former performance in the radio play *Funny Boy*. So naturally when it came to cast Kabir, Orville was perfect for it. He plays the role of an annoyed and irritated teenager who is dissatisfied with everything and everyone. His certain mean acts with Papaji, though unknowingly creates some humour in the otherwise depressing movie. He perhaps is the only one in the family who is truly Canadian, much to the confusion and bewilderment of the rest of the family.

Loveleen- The role of Loveleen, Chand's niece is performed by Geetika Sharma. As the youngest in the family Loveleen, is the classic victim in-the making. It was Geetika's first film and she scores well with an absolute natural performance. Her talent and hard work ensures her long aspiring acting career in the future.

After individually considering the cast and characters of the movie, the next task is to analyse the transnational space managed by Deepa Mehta in *Videsh- Heaven on Earth*.

Managing Space in the Transnational Cinema of *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*

It is a fact that genres are often spatially over determined by both gender and sexuality. From Elsaesser to Mulvey, "melodrama has been considered to be feminine and domestic genre, characterized by emotion, immobility, enclosed space and confinement. Such a configuration is postulated in opposition to a masculine space, which is outside and is characterized by "adventure, movement, and cathartic action."(qtd in Sohat and Stam 211) Though every society and social condition defines its own space but Indian societal condition very much follows the above mentioned space structure.

Concentrating upon the genre of cinema and more precisely transnational cinema genre, what is contained within the frame as well that, which is left out are important signifiers of the film's possible range of meanings in any piece of content analysis. Besides the above mentioned gendered subjectivity, in the case of

transnational cinema genre, the inside and outside spaces also convey the national and cultural thoughts and desires. Critics globally have handled spatial issues differently in case of male and female- whereas Western critics limit enclosed spaces to women and indicated fading of nature but many non-Western critics in addition to associating inner quarters as woman's domain also relate wilderness and sea with women. Transnational filmmakers convey through their films these different styles of spatial inscription.

Hamid Naficy further explaining the spatial traits adopted by transnational filmmakers writes:

They destabilize the traditional gendered binarism of space since in transnationality the boundaries between self and other, female and male, inside and outside, homeland and hostland are blurred and must continually be negotiated. Moreover, spatial configuration in their films is driven not only by structures of identification and alienation but also by eruptions of memory and nostalgia and the tensions of acculturation. ("Phobic spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre")

Thus it is the use of space to show temporal and physical dislocation which makes an examination of the frame in a diasporic film different. Space in transnational cinema acts to mediate between cosmos (order) and chaos (disorder).

Deepa Mehta in her movie *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* has aptly displayed the dynamics of open and closed spatial framework to portray more than what is apparent. In transnational genre, it is the enclosed claustrophobic spaces, mostly in the form of prisons, which both depict and determine the melodrama of transnational subjectivity. A prominent feature of Deepa Mehta's treatment of enclosed spaces within *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* is that out of some 60 scenes in the movie major scenes are shot within the house. As for the external spaces-there is the sequence at the terrace of Chand's house, Niagara falls, backyard of house in Canada, some shots in the car with outside scenery. Besides this the scenes take place at the airport, Chand's working place, the honeymoon hotel room. The outside world and its influences are severely

minimized and Deepa Mehta's camera keeps its spotlight within the house of the Dhillon family in Brampton.

The portrayal of a highly curtailed world of Dhillon family is painstakingly visible through the lens of Deepa Mehta. Since the outside excursions are mostly for the males in the house, Rocky and Baldev are shown missing from the house at many times of the day. While for women Chand and Aman they have restricted choices, their workplace or grocery store. Even within the house Chand and Aman are shown mostly in kitchen cooking food for the whole family. While the whole family sits and enjoys dinner, Chand is shown making chapattis at quick pace to serve her big family.

The house of Dhillon family which is shown in complete isolation gives a bit unrealistic touch to the setting of the story. This family strangely enough never gets a visitor and on the top of it even at the ritually important occasion of Chand and Rocky's marriage, no relatives are shown. The post – marriage period in any community is usually time for guests and neighbours to pour in for celebrate. Even, though the film is shot in Canada, no foreigner or white skin person is part of the script. The whole story begins and ends in the family with no exits or outlets. The total isolation of this family is not only unrealistic but also claustrophobic surrounding depicted by Deepa Mehta.

The claustrophobic treatment of space gets worse as the viewer moves into the house- there is a drawing-cum dining space with a big sofa opposite the TV set, which shows *Gurbani* in most part of the film. There are side chairs arranged for the extra members to fit in. The living room has a picture of Guru Gobind Singh on the main wall of the drawing room, picture of Harmandir Sahib on the wall near the dining table and a small picture of Guru Nanakji on the side table. This common space has doors that lead to a small kitchen and two bedrooms one for each of the couples. The rooms are fairly similar, a double bed, a dressing table and a big window which shows curtains. In the bedroom of Rocky and Chand picture of a landscape and Mona Lisa is visible. Rocky's parents are shown sleeping on the sofa in the drawing room with their grandson along. The major part of the movie of around 120 minutes is shot within this space with very little outside scenes.

This claustrophobic space is felt by all the members of the family but it is Chand, the protagonist, a female who suffers the maximum because of this isolation. It is no doubt a fact that since forever home or house has been considered majorly as woman's space. But sadly, this house, which is regarded as the only space for a woman to flourish is also ironically guided by patriarchal dictums in which familial and spiritual values are expected to be upheld. So actually patriarchy and conservatism always permeates this so called "woman's space". Thus Chand is no different to this usual concept of woman's space. To begin with, the woman's space that Chand occupies is actually her husbands' home, and upon entering it, rules pertaining to the role as a wife have to be adhered to. Appropriating Hamid Naficy's ideas (2001) at this point, Chand can be referred to as diasporic entity in her husband's home; a foreigner or outsider to his own regional space. Thus she loses her space doubly: both emotional (moving from parent's house to husband's house) and physical space (moving from India to Canada). In her present space everything is according to her husband's terms. Her functioning within the house is therefore determined by the servitude to her husband.

Chand's feelings are veteran at two interacting and interconnected levels of home: the physical space that she dwells in and her body. Compositions of feeling, as explained by Hamid Naficy (2001), are the diasporic experience of space that is apparent in the films of "accented" filmmakers. It is clear at the beginning of *Videsh: Heaven on Earth* that Chand's marriage has been arranged: she and Rocky hardly knew each other. The act of arranging a marriage predictably involves the passing of the bride-to-be (and by implication, her body) from the ownership of her father to the possession of her husband. Chand, therefore, never experiences home as that of her own. Her body is thus captive to the house in which she is owned. Her caging, as a result, is enforced and maintained by the "button marked tradition" as mentioned by Deepa Mehta in her film *Fire*. This idiom is a new way to suggest religious myths and practices that idealize favoured female behaviour. These homes are reasonably never utopic for her. For instance, her arrival at Rocky's home was painful because there were new aspects of ownership (like the abuse of her body) that she had to settle within. Feelings of ambivalence consequently emerge and Chand, as a result maps a new space,

within patriarchal confines in which to convey her sexual desire. This space is manifested in her dreams which incarnate before her a new and changed Rocky. Thus she invites and allows a Naga to enter her personal space and in this union she finally experiences an openness and freedom of being.

Her plurality at the end exposes a strong and self-willed woman as opposed to a timid and shy girl. Her final border-crossing allows her to gain sexual maturity. And, in doing so, Chand learns not to exhibit her identity like a “trained monkey”. The taking of control of her soul and mind is a metaphor for the defiance of the expectations placed on her by tradition and myth. Falling in Naga’s love is therefore much satisfying for her. Unlike being a wife to Rocky, a role she played and in which she was expected to be subservient and subordinate, she is much happier with the incarnate Rocky. Her dreams and desires are shared and understood, as she and the Naga are synchronised in their thoughts and feelings.

In the language of Hamid Naficy (2001), as diasporic entity in her husbands’ home and feeling pressure (through in-laws) to conform to its ideals, Chand experience her woman’s space as an indecisive and hesitant location. It is an interstitial position between the women that she is strained to be and the women that she desires to be. The ambiguity that emerges at this level is favourable to the refashioning of her identity and the space in which she is housed. Finally she does find a new identity and a space in her imagination which consequently refashions her identity into a stronger personality.

Bollywood star Preity Zinta and her debutant co-star Vansh Bhardwaj are nothing short of genius, given the innate challenges of the script and the uncertain balance of empathy. Additionally the whole cast is inspired and brings intimacy to each well-crafted dramatic moment. Preity Zinta delivers her one of the finest performance to date. She displays the helplessness and pain that this character demands with immense passion. Vansh Bhardwaj is equally striking. Very rarely do first-timers enact their parts with such precision.

In addition to employing spatial significance to the script there are various other techniques added by Deepa Mehta in order to carry the story to another level of importance.

Other Techniques employed by Deepa Mehta

Polarities-Deepa Mehta, as a director, always had an obsession for creation of contrasts and polarities and successfully carried them to laborious limits. One very significant aspect of *Videsh – Heaven on Earth* is the organization of the scenes and interlacing of three major threads of the narrative- the Punjabi *Gurbani* tradition, middle class life and revolt. The scene sequence gives a clue to Deepa Mehta's method. The *Gurbani* reference continuous in the major part of the film as the old couple of Biji and Papaji are shown watching mostly *Gurbani* on the TV set. While the Punjabi *Gurbani* gives the message of good deeds, tolerance and love for one and all, poor Chand is beaten up violently while everybody is busy listening to *Gubani*. No one retaliates or speak against this inhuman gesture. When there is a close up shot of Rocky beating Chand everyone maintains a calm attitude. It is the little Kabir (Orville Maciel digs into the rebellious part with gusto) penchant for talking back to his elders who does show some rebellion in his attitude but he also stoops to pushing Chand on bed and shoving the weak as a means of getting what he wants.

To display the polarities within the middle class set up in Canada, the marriage of Chand is a perfect example that fits in. Chand, a young Punjabi girl, travels from the comfort and security of her family in India to Canada to wed her family's choice of mate. The institution of marriage which is highly revered as an auspicious event in Indian community, here turns out to be nothing more than a business tactic for the Indian middle class residents of Dhillon family in Canada. This arrangement involves a \$20,000 dowry and the further utilization of holy matrimony to fast track the relocation of other relatives to the land of immigrant consultants failed promises and brutal winters. All the expectations of Chand for a bright happy future depressingly crash away. All the family members especially Chand's mother-in law fails to earn any respect as the elder in the family. She on the other hand becomes Chand's rival. Biji (Balinder Johal) is very happy at the arrival of her new daughter-in law; she is impressed by her beauty however within no time she gets insecure regarding her son. She utilizes every situation to fan Rocky's anger against Chand so that they can never enjoy any happy moments. On the very first night of the couple after marriage, Biji calls Rocky and demands an immediate demonstration of who he loves most and as such the

conjugal duties are postponed to the honeymoon. Balinder Johal's tenor and tone are ideal for the domineering matriarch crashes the party as it seems she had a dream that her beloved son was in an accident. Rajinder Singh Cheema plays the father-in-law though he is the head of the family but he acts as a mere observer of the ugly pageant unfolding in his household. As the time passes everything auspicious and prosperous associated with the alliance of marriage is highly disgraced by the Dhillon family.

Deepa Mehta keeps playing with editing trick over and over again: - Though it is the wedding night of Rocky and Chand, Aman and Baldev are shown love making, while the Gurbani is going on, all the family with the elders are shown enjoying chicken, while Biji appreciates Loveleen, the little girl with *chunni* and *lipstic* as '*sohni vohti*'. On the other hand the other new bride Chand is shown being beaten up by Rocky without any interference by any member of the family.

Symbols

Stairs-In the beginning of the movie Chand and her mother are seen sitting on the stairs and conversing about the coming future of Chand. Stairs are meant to go up and down as well and accordingly, many classic melodramas have staged many emotional high and low points against the vertical axis of staircase. Similarly, here the scene depicts the great emotional expectations of Chand which she foresees about her upcoming marriage. Sitting at the ebb of the staircase she looks up towards her mother who advises her regarding any future difficulties. Here, stairs symbolise a pendulum of hope for Chand where she expects to go upstairs but sadly as the story proceeds, all her hopes and expectations are badly shattered thus ironically leaving her again sitting at the ebb of the staircase hopelessly.

Water-The metonymical use and the multi-layered implication of the water as a symbol is essential to the plot of the movie. Madhavi. A. Moharil describes about the symbolic use of water, "Besides reflecting the shifting moods of the characters and the twists in the narrative in tandem with the changes in Nature, the water operates as a regenerative element as well as a purifying agent." (5) Similarly in the movie, water symbolises as a source of hope and expectations. It works as a symbol of optimism where Chand floats

a boat in the bath tub symbolizing the boat carrying her back home, and of hopelessness and also a witness of Naga and Chand enjoying an affectionate talk.

Colour scheme- The interaction with light and colour signals claustrophobia, which, according to Hamid Naficy, is characteristic of the liminal panics of the independent transnational film genre:

A variety of strategies are used to create such spaces, including the following: closed shot compositions, tight physical spaces within the diegesis, barriers within the mise-en-scene and the shot that impede vision and access, and a lighting scheme that created a mood of constriction and blocked vision. Often many of these strategies are condensed in the site in which the film unfolds. Such locations are self-referential, but since at the same time they refer to other places, they are also symbolic. (“Phobic spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre” 131)

The use of black and white was a choice that Giles Nuttgens and Deepa Mehta decided much before the beginning of the actual creative process. This technique was employed to emphasize the thematic motifs of isolation and imagination ingrained within the script. Through this technique, Deepa Mehta, attempted convince the spectator to observe the characters render their most personal fears and fantasies in utmost consistent severity. The very first use of black and white in the film is at Niagara Falls which is a bit astonishing. However, it certainly conveys an intense sense of remoteness and a disconnection between the usual idea of (the romanticism of Niagara Falls) and the actuality of the circumstances at the moment.

The black and white scene where Chand is in bathroom and making paper boat float in the water tub is really touching. There is something captivating, as well as painful, when the viewers see the characters in this visual context; a bit like witnessing the consequences of an accident. It is hard to take eyes off the victims and yet feel awfully guilty about watching them. In order not to feel like a voyeur there is a tendency to distance the viewers from what they are seeing.



No doubt, this device of black and white employed to gain absolute objectivity is at times agonizing but it is certainly worth applause. The fractured warm moments of Chand and Rocky's lives are like considering an x-ray of a broken bone or tumor, bare, colourless threatening and yet convincing. Deepa Mehta also tries to progress these black and white segments into alternative narratives: dreamlike meetings with the gentle, loving husband that Chand dreamt of. Deepa Mehta also coats these black and white wish-fulfilment vignettes with traditional folk tales to depict the disparity between the stark Canadian reality and the much loved fantasy co-existing in Chand's mind. Conversely in spite of its pros and cons this creative scheme is certainly an appealing effort for many reasons. Firstly, though it takes viewers to the very cause of the domestic-abuse story but still it saves the audience from the concerned agony. Deepa Mehta does not avoid illustrating the violence, but along with it she is smart enough to provide the element of distance from the pain through the balm of magic realism. It is the hope that Chand will ultimately escape from this fate, because she's a smart and imaginative enough. Secondly, Deepa Mehta's split narrative leaves enough gaps for humour -- or what is really just a healthy enjoyment for the absurd. For instance, according to an old running folk tale the story has Rocky shape-shifting into a cobra -- a plot twist that actually invades the real world when the family gathers around the alleged 'cobra pit' in the snow-covered backyard. So this real and unreal, authentic and bizarre, intensity and moderation is compellingly provided by Deepa Mehta through black and white colour patterning.

In terms of locations, the film is shot mostly in Brampton, but also in Niagara Falls, Toronto, the Gardiner Expressway and Punjab, India.

Humor- Deepa Mehta also manages humour in otherwise serious film. The two little sibling's Lovelen and Kabir put in some comical touches to otherwise uptight script. One of *Videsh's* most heart-warming and humorous scenes is when Rocky closes in on Chand hinting at a loving encounter, while she asks him about his hobbies. Another one is Chand using the washroom in her new home, well after everyone's asleep, explaining her inhibitions among a group of strangers. Other nuances too are pleasant—the little girl Loveleen's attraction with the ravishing new bride, Kabir flushing his grandfather's dentures just to unburden some of his frustration with the whole situation. And the entire family vacating the home during the day and parking themselves in a mall, as the home has been rented out to night-shift immigrants who need a place to sleep during day.

All the above mentioned techniques join together to help the script grow more in meaning and thought. The only annoying and unacceptable element in the film is the sudden and hasty ending. Though the provided ending does grant the script a closure and an idea of what's going to happen to Chand and Rocky but Deepa Mehta doesn't play out any moments of liberation or revenge. She simply offers the audiences a ray of hope and survival. In the movie after witnessing the long sad journey of Chand, this ending doesn't seem like much. However, in spite of some loopholes whatever has been depicted and expressed by Deepa Mehta is commendable.

After scrutinizing the script of *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* from comparative criteria's the subsequent step in this research undertaking is to technically investigate through the mechanics of narrative.

4. Mechanics of Narrative

As the comparative scheme employed by this research endeavour, analysis in terms mechanics of narrative by Gerard Genette follows next in line. Gerard Genette opines that each single text reveals trace of narration, which can be considered in order to comprehend exactly how the narrative is planned. In order to achieve this probable result, the narrative can vary in its- order, duration and frequency of events. Skilful use

of these methods helps the narrator to recognize the particular narrative fundamentals which are being stressed by the author and dynamics of the structure and organization of the text.

4.a. Order

Order is the relation between chaining of events in the story and their arrangement in the narrative. It is upon narrator's choice to either narrate the events in the chronological order they transpired, or to relate them out of sequence. For example, in case of detective or mystery novels, the story often begins with suspense of a murder that has to be solved. This blending of temporal order yields a more captivating and intricate plot.

Deepa Mehta has given an additional international flavour to otherwise Girish Karnad's Indian play *Naga-Mandala*. While integrating the themes of immigration and diasporic loss to the folk-mythical story of Rani and Naga, Deepa Mehta through the character of Chand sends an international statement in support of women empowerment. Centring upon the order of narrative in the film, it is no doubt that the movie sequences itself on a very fast based track. Whereas most of the scenes follow each other hastily while at other occasions some scenes appear to be unnecessarily dragged. It is strange that Chand immediately after her *sangeet* ceremony reaches Canada, while no scene of her departure by her parents is shown. In Canada, after a hasty marriage, in no time she is shown working in a factory which again seems a bit too much in a rush. For no solid reasons, Rocky starts ill-treating his wife thus making Chand's life nothing but living hell. This is the first portion of the story before interval where the order of the narrative is no doubt linear but with some major gaps.

In the second half of the story, the linear chronological sequencing of events is certainly disturbed by the story line continually moving between the mythical and the real. The mythical track is led by the addition of the metaphorical Naga as Rocky which slows down the otherwise hasty narrative in the first portion through addition of some thoughtful scenes between Chand and the incarnate Rocky. This imaginary alliance of incarnate Rocky and Chand brings happiness and joy in Chand's until now depressed life. However, when the real Rocky finds about his wife's relationship with some other

male he physically tortures her and accuses her of adultery. The whole family accuses her and none comes to her rescue. So very easily the storyline grants its excess into imagination and then again into reality. The ending of the story is again mythical as it calls for Chand to undertake a snake ordeal to prove her chastity and her final exit.

Anuj Kumar in *The Hindu*, states regarding the strategy of Deepa Mehta in the film:

She brings out the dual nature of such husbands that keeps the abused wives confused. At times they are caring, at times brutal. Deepa has taken a metaphorical approach to drive home the point, mixing Girish Karnad's play *Naga-Mandala* with an otherwise linear script. The mythical *Naga* and its moulting are symbolic of the husband's dual behaviour. The storyline is not cogent as it moves between the mythical and the real. ("Tale of a tormented wife -- *Videsh - Heaven On Earth*")

4.b. Duration

Substantial effects may be realized by varying the narrative speed of the text. Gerard Genette explains that ideally in theatrical performances the event-story has the same duration as the staged narration. However, in literary texts, the narrator can speed up or slow down the narration in context of the events being told. For example, the author can summarize someone's entire life in a single sentence, or can take a thousand pages to recount events occurring over a day's time.

Videsh- Heaven on Earth screens time period of two months journey of the miserable life of Chand's married life in almost one and half hour (106 minutes). Slated for release on March 27 2006, the film has mainly been shot in Toronto, Niagara Falls, Gardiner Expressway and a short sequence is filmed in Chandigarh. It is shot both in Hindi as well as Punjabi. The portions from Canada are shot within thirty days in intense cold weather (minus twenty).

Focusing upon the duration modes within the movie, the film begins with a *descriptive pause* where the *sangeet* ceremony is being shown. It is a descriptive pause because here the audience is neither aware about the protagonist and nor about the occasion for this festivities. It is only with the further upcoming scenes that the audiences make a supposition about the whole circumstances about Chand being getting

married. There are many *elliptic* scenes in the movie where either the events are edited by the director because they are unwanted or for the fast narration of the story. The scene of Chand's departure is elapsd from the script, from having a wise conversation with her mother she is directly shown in the aeroplane lavatory talcuming herself. Then there are many instances of *summary* scenes available in the script: Chand's marriage, her honeymoon and finally her exit are highly summarised. The scenes where Chand undergo physical torture follow the *slow-down* duration mode as the physicality is followed by painful yet thoughtful colourless monologues of Chand.

4.c. Frequency

Frequency is the relation between the number of times an event occurs in the story and the number of times it is mentioned in the narrative. In his book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gerard Genette writes:

A system of relationships is established between these capacities for 'repetition' on the part of both the narrated events (of the story) and the narrative statements (of the text) – a system of relationships that we can priori reduce to four virtual types, simply from the multiplication of the two possibilities given on both sides: the event repeated or not, the statement repeated or not (114).

In the film all the events naturally set in one after another. The sequence of Chand remembering her parents and trying to contact them occurs often. Thrice in the movie she demands of calling them to which Rocky, her husband always replies 'kal' (tomorrow) and practically that tomorrow never comes. She tries to call them from the office but fails to talk to them. Chand's attempts to lure her husband recur in the movie. Her usages of talcum powder, perfume, sweet talk or finally the magical root are all her desperate efforts to seduce Rocky to her charm. However, sadly enough, Chand's destiny had no fortunate upbringings. The first usage of magical root makes Rocky unconscious while the second attempt of feeding him the magical root leads to the incarnation of the Naga as Rocky. The incarnate Rocky meets Chand twice in the movie and after both the meetings Chand is confused and surprised.

There are oft-repeated scenes of physical violence in the movie. Rocky slaps Chand on their honeymoon, then brutally kicks her in her stomach in front of everybody in the kitchen. Before the final *Naag Pariksha* in the movie he brutally beats Chand on knowing that she was with another man.

The Narrator and Point of View

Robert Stam (2005) asserts that the term “point of view” is ambiguous and tricky as every element that contribute in this venture can supposedly assume a narrational point of view because of the multi-track and multi-form character of all art. Talking in context of the genre of film and especially about *Videsh- Heaven on Earth* in particular, Robert Stam’s argument holds valid. He states that every contributing element- writer and director, the actors and their characters, editors, sound and music composers, costume designers – all have diverse point of view and different degrees of authority in the production. If one accepts that for most part and for most audiences *Videsh-Heaven on Earth* can be categorized as an interrogative text(questions issues of immigration, isolation and displacement), than what for Robert Stam is theoretically problematic can usefully be harnessed in practical terms to bring multiple “ points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction”(qtd in Belsey 92).

This is not to assert that this essentials a rivalry within various components for acquiring some predominant narrational role. Rather it ensures that either working in accord or in discord, all rudiments supply to and concern the attitude of the audience’s response of the adaptation. Moreover all the elements are standardized in the writing, direction, performance and production to control what Robert Stam suggests, “intimacy and distance... and access to character’s knowledge and consciousness”(*Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* 32). To receive the film as a coherent whole, the audience must perceive the film comprehensively rather than judging different elements individually.

Though there is no single narrator in the film but the focus of the film still remains the miserable life of Chand after her marriage. Each performer in the movie is suffering from different problems so their point of view changes likewise. Rocky, on whom rests the hope and pride of the entire Dhillon family is pressurised by familial

responsibilities. The pressures of his family make him aggressive and violent in his behaviour. Aman, the sister in law is completely unaffected by the whole situation. She sports her surrender like an emblem of credit and anticipates Chand to do the equivalent. Biji is a domineering patriarch as she is insecure about her son falling on the charms of his new bride. All the characters in their situation add a new point of view to the script. In addition Deepa Mehta in the wake of the story of Chand focuses on immigration, isolation, and the power of the imagination as the three basic themes of the film.

Other associates of the movie like editors, singers, costume designers add to their bit to the whole movie. It was the director of photography, Giles Nuttgens, decision to shoot some portions of the movie in black and white to highlight the main themes in the story. Film editor Colin Monie gave his own additions to the script. Thus, Deepa Mehta has been very successfully able to mirror her point of view in the film and has able to make a new creation while being faithful to the basics of the source text.

Finally closing this adaptation analysis of Deepa Mehta's directorial *Videsh-Heaven on Earth*, it would be suitable to state that Deepa Mehta in this film succeeds as usual in providing the viewers with a great cinema. *Heaven on Earth* keeps all possibilities open, maintaining an air of ambiguity that is alternately tantalizing and exasperating. Deepa Mehta luckily has a compelling vessel for the bereft and bemused Chand in Preity Zinta, who poignantly plays against the 'cool-chick' persona for which she is renowned in the Bollywood circuit. Through an honest and powerful film, *Heaven on Earth*, she is successful in portraying the miserable life of hundreds of NRI wives through depicting the importance of mythology in our culture.