FEMALE IN A LEAD ROLE IN BOLLYWOOD MOVIES

Hindi cinema has portrayed the changing faces, roles, and contribution etc of Indian women through lead character. From a shy and ordinary woman to the intelligent and dynamic personality, the films have given enough space to sketch the image of woman. From Meena Kumari, Madhubala to Hema Malini, Rekha, Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, Madhuri Dixit and Aishwarya Rai and others, Hindi films became louder in every sense- voice, articulation and delivery of dialogue, sexual aggressiveness and terms of character which has been taking part in the society. Directors like Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, Madhur Bhandarkar, Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Basu, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Anurag Kashyap have been very sensitive with progressive approach to the portrayal of women in Bollywood movies. It’s also true that many filmmakers have used women as an object and made movies that can be called a package of sex and violence but many commercial and art movies have also focused on the progressive image of women and through their lead role, these movies have played a great role in the field of women empowerment.

Hindi cinema has created and articulated the changing scenarios of modern India to a level that no earlier art could ever attain. Portrayal of women in Hindi cinema has been a favourite theme. She is soft and yet very strong inside. The endurance she possesses is beyond imagination. She has the capability to handle trouble and bear anything with equal ease. She displays many emotions from joy to jealousy, from fear to fondness and from sadness to surprise. She is the one who plays so many roles each day as mother, a wife, a daughter and a professional and yet excels in all her roles. She is none other than the woman. Even in reel-life, every Bollywood film incomplete without a woman’s presence. Her mere presence lights up the screens thereby creating an unmatchable atmosphere within the dark confines of the cinema hall.

Indian cinema is the largest medium of communication with the masses, and close to twelve million people are watching films every week in cinema houses and theatres
Cinema essentially reflects the social setting from which it springs and in which it flourish. Even as the multimedia machinery wields a remarkable command on the public, cinema’s populist reach shapes public view as compared to other medium. Such power begets exceptional accountability, requiring periodic reassessments with many questions such as: How has Indian cinema treated the Indian woman? Has it been rational and practical in portraying women? Has it been able to evaluate her various problems? Has it championed her reason? Has it come up with solutions? On the whole, these answers are in the pessimistic.

Bollywood underlines what is already common in our tradition bound society – that women need to maintain the cultural tradition like wear the Indian type of dress, visit temples, conduct poojas, maintain relationships with family (both own and in-laws), but men can generally do whatever they want. And this “morality’ is reflected time and again in Bollywood movies. It is true that we cannot overlook the role of woman in Indian Cinema from Mother India to Mirch Masala to Chandni Bar. Each of these films undermines a seemingly progressive female character (Bagchi, 1996). Like these there are a variety of movies in which female characters have stronger roles. Aparna Sen in the 80’s with “Paroma”, where the woman walk the path of so-called “promiscuity” only to achieve emotional maturity in the long run. Today, directors like Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair and Meghna Gulzar are honest enough to represent ‘taboo topics’ like lesbianism, polygamy and even surrogate motherhood, where it is the woman who takes the lead role in proposing, making love and even in deciding to “lease” her womb without the consent of her husband-to-be. While in “Fire” and “Kamasutra”, the women dared the world to explore their sexual desires (Datta, 2000), in Mahesh Manjrekar’s “Astitva”, the soulful Aditi gives birth to a child out of marriage and shatters the futile world of male arrogance when finally the truth is disclosed. She's shown as a middle class woman in an average Indian family who has her sexual desires. The film questions the feminist ethical concerns through the comprehensive review of sexual and family relationships.
3.1 FEMALE IN LEAD ROLE IN EARLY BOLLYWOOD MOVIES

Indian cinema began with D Phalke’s Raja Harischandra in 1913; and the first film dealing with a woman’s problem appeared in 1919 with the mythical Ahilya Uddhar (“The Purification of Ahilya”). In the early days of silent film, however, mainly in the 1920s, most of the country’s women-focused cinema revolved around sati films, around the woman who ‘voluntarily’ enters her husband’s funeral pyre. The sati woman had no individual identity of her own; her only aim in life was to look after the welfare of her lord and master husband. Sati films continued to be produced all through the following decades; even after the 1960s, the decline of conventional sati stories led to updated versions that focused on committed wives.

Ironically, side-by-side with the sati stereotype, the image of the single woman of tremendous strength of character and physique reigned supreme on the screen from the 1930s until well into the 1950s. She was portrayed by the fearless Nadia, the stunt queen, who believed in action rather than the silent agony of the virtuous. Nadia’s on-screen acts of daredevilry would have put Tarzan, James Bond and Rambo to shame. In 1934, she made Hunterwali, followed by a series of similar films. After a few lean years, during which time Nadia took hairdressing courses, in 1943 the ‘Queen’ made a grand comeback with The Daughter of Hunterwali. Nadia continued fighting onscreen for the next decade, but there wasn’t another heroine to take on villains single-handedly until Geeta aur Seeta (1972), when dream-girl Hema Malini exploded onto the scene in a double role.

The double portrayal of the onscreen Indian woman actually has ancient roots. According to conventional beliefs, a woman can be the personification of either of two ideals. On the one hand, she can be a gentle, pious and submissive creature always sacrificing for the sakes of others, particularly the husband. On the other hand, she can be Shakti incarnate, taking after the goddess of retaliation and devastation and exhibiting her ferocious and ruthless side. Here, she is the representation of female brute force, striking terror in the hearts of men. Given such traditionally contradictory manifestations of female-hood, it is not unexpected that so many sati films ran side-by-side with Nadia’s stunt movies.
Though women-oriented films have been few in view of the number of productions to come out of Bombay over the years, the list does comprise a number of brave efforts that present female protagonists with sympathy. The director Subramaniyan, himself of high caste, made the very bold Balyogini in the 1930s in Tamil and Telugu, exposing the bitter lot of widows. He featured a real Brahmin widow with a shaven head, for which the director was furiously declared an outcaste. Indeed, the subject of widowhood has encouraged daring filmmakers over the decades.

Slowly and steadily with change in society and with socio-economic circumstance compelling more and more women to share and shoulder the burden of supporting the family, the film world could hardly neglect this aspect. So away from the travails of the courtesan and prostitute, it was important for cinema to start dealing with the dilemmas confronting the modern working woman in the hostile urban environment. Curiously, however, few directors took up the issue as their theme. Though films like Typist Girl, Telephone Girls and Educated Wife were made in the 1920s, the subsequent decades have not yielded a crop to keep pace. College Girl and Indira M A in 1934, Nurse and Lady Doctor in the mid-1940s and Dr. Vidya in 1964 attempted to portray educated and working women, but they are usually seen as halfhearted efforts and did not get much acceptance in the society.

Filmmakers have long been showing woman in two most popular roles that is of a traditional wife and other those who, by dint of birth or circumstance, are forced to take on the world’s oldest profession. The father of Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke, weighed in on the subject with KanyaVikray in 1924. In spite of considerable consequent contributions to the genre, however, Indian filmmakers have done little to delve into the problems or social implications of prostitution. Rather, it has been the romance of the high-class courtesan or dancing girls that has ablaze the imaginations of many directors.

There have been many popular and well-made films on the alluring but unfortunate lives of the court entertainer, the classic being K Asif’s Mughal-e-Azam (1960). Recently colourized, the film is a tragedy based on the love story of the historic Prince Salim (Jahangir) and the commoner-dancer Anarkali. Both Pakeezah (1972) and
UmraoJaan (1981) evoked a long-gone era when the beauty of a courtesan could supposedly change the course of history. Only a few excellent films about working girls come to mind. One was Satyajit Ray’s lyrical ‘Mahanagar’. *Mahanagar* explores the evolving independence of middle-class women of the city. The main protagonist Arati, a home maker, takes up a job as a door-to-door saleswoman to meet the increasing financial pressure on her family. Despite familial adversity and societal obstacles the initially hesitant and nervous Arati soon begins to prosper in her field and gradually starts to enjoy her new found financial and psychological independence. Her initially supportive husband starts to feel insecure decides to ask Arati to quit but is finally forced to let her continue to work once he loses his job (SatyajitRay.org, 2009). Mrinal Sen’s *Ek Din Pratidin* (1979) poignantly described a typical middle-class situation in which a daughter is allowed to earn for her family, but inspires a family crisis when she comes home late. In spite of the efforts of Ray, Sen and a few others, Indian cinema has largely unsuccessful to keep up with the experiences of the country’s working women.

There have been some subtle films that have dealt effectively with complex nuances of the female consciousness. *Charulata*, made by Satyajit Ray in 1964, the film tells the story of a lonely housewife, known as Charu, who lives a wealthy, secluded and idle life and the unspoken platonic love that she feels for her brother-in-law; a subject that could have resulted in a crude film in lesser hands was turned into a magnificent masterpiece by Ray. No discussion of female depictions in Indian cinema would be complete without paying homage to the great director Bimal Roy’s *Parineeta, Biraj Bahu* and *Bandini* in 1963 will be remembered for the grace and charm of their women protagonists, as well as for the masterful unraveling of their stories. Whereas all of these great films have served the cause of Indian women in one way or another, as a whole they remain in the minority. The woman of today’s commercial Indian cinema is a one-dimensional creature. She is either self-sacrificing to a fault or a painted trollop out to ruin every man and marriage she finds. What has been a requirement in the past remains so today: we need practical, believable depictions of women, portrayed so even in the simplest of films. Contemporary characters need to be
neither pure white nor midnight black – but full, real and in Technicolour. There is an audience out there, a large section of it female, to understand such output.

3.2 FEMALE IN LEAD ROLE IN COMMERCIAL CINEMA

Along with the early Bollywod movies, Commercial cinema of the later decades has reflected all aspects of woman through the lead character. The image of women as ‘Sita’ has been repetitively evoked in many films after independence. Through the thoughts of devotion and submission to the husband, Hindi cinema effectively institutionalized patriarchal ideals. Films like Dahej (1950), Gauri (1968), Devi (1970), Biwi ho to Aisi (1988), Pati Parmeshwar (1988) depicted women as inert, docile wives as ideal figures and martyrs for their own families. In these films, however the practices of patriarchy were criticized, they were completely being patronized in the sense that the victim wife refuses to leave her husband’s house in spite of ruthless physical and emotional violence by a justification of leaving the marital home only at the time of her death. This thought has been perpetuated by Indian customs and signs like ‘doli’ (Palanquin) and ‘arthi’ (Funeral Bier) (Tere, 2012). Two roles that are of particular significance in Indian popular cinema are those of mother and wife, and there is a disparity between the representations of these two roles (Gokulsing & Dissanayaka, 2004).

How real are the women characters in commercial Hindi films? This is something to question about because ethics, principles, ideology; morality have subjugated the frame in which these films are placed. Hence, women rather than being depicted as common human beings are elevated to a senior position of being ideal who can commit no wrong. Their grievances, wishes, ambitions, thoughts, perspectives are entirely absent from the scene. They are in fact portrayed as the other because they are shown as not belonging to this real and worldly life. For e.g.: Abhimaan (1973) is the story of a wife (Jaya Bachchan) who is more talented than her husband had to give up flourishing career in music to save her marriage and to satisfy her jealous husband so as to adhere to the traditional values of marriage and motherhood.
Bollywood heroines have mostly been homely, content to stay happily ever after in the institution of marriage even if educated and keen to carve and identify of one’s own. Where are the women building careers and working professionally? They have been almost silenced. Hindi cinema in the seventies had women in different working roles like Jaya Bachchan as a knife sharpener in ‘Zanjeer’ in 1973. The film opens on Diwali with the death of young Vijay Khanna's parents, done by a man of unknown identity with a white horse on his charm bracelet, "zanjeer". Because of this traumatic event, Vijay has recurring nightmares of a white stallion. Even as a child Vijay stays socially awkward and stays away from the other kids, showing the audience that he believes himself to be alone. Fast forward 20 years, and Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) is now an inspector, an honest police officer in a town where few are just. He receives complaints about a local man, Sher Khan (Pathan) (Pran) loosely based on KarimLala, who is running gambling dens. When he calls Khan in for questioning, Khan's superiority complex chafes against Khanna's police authority, as he scolds the officer, telling him he only orders him around due to the uniform he wears. Vijay takes him up on his challenge, and meets him in street clothes to fight him. At fight's end, Sher Khan not only closes his gambling dens, but has gained respect for Vijay. He becomes an auto mechanic, and reforms his ways.

Various dealings of the underworld continue unabated throughout the town, all tracing back to gang leader Teja (Ajit Khan). A mysterious caller continually phones Inspector Khanna to inform him exactly when a crime is about to take place, but hangs up before Khanna can extract any more information out of him. When a traffic accident perpetrated by gang members leaves several children dead, a witness, a street performer named Mala (Jaya Bhaduri), is bribed by Teja's men to keep quiet. When she is questioned by Vijay, he becomes enraged at her denying she knows anything, and, to sway her differently, takes her into the morgue to view the mangled bodies of the children. She has a change of heart, and comes clean, asking that the bribe be donated to an orphanage. She identifies the man behind the traffic accident. Once it is known that Mala has broken her word, Teja's men come after her. She is chased through the night, narrowly escaping across the train tracks, and coming to Inspector Khanna's house, desperate for shelter. He lets her in, allows her to stay, and the two discover that they are both orphans, and discuss
the fears associated with living alone. Khanna kindly takes her to his brother and sister-in-law, and, under the sister-in-law's tutelage, Mala begins to learn how to keep house, as well as English, and other refinements.

Eventually, Vijay is framed for bribery, stripped of his title and position as inspector, and jailed for 6 months on false charges, trapped by Teja. When he is released from jail, he plans to take revenge. Mala, by this time, has developed from a frightened stranger seeking his help to a romantic interest for him. She begs him, to seal their relationship, that he must stop being so vengeful. He agrees, but soon must come to terms with such a promise when he meets, in a Christian cemetery, the informant who had called him in the past when he was an inspector. The man, De Silva (Om Prakash), appears half-insane, holding onto an empty bottle. He says that on Christmas several years before, his three sons drank poisoned moonshine, and died from it. Until the killer is found, he will continue to wander with the bottle. When local criminals mocked him and called him crazy, he vowed to get back at them as he could: by phoning the inspector when a crime was about to happen. After hearing this news, Vijay becomes depressed, torn between his desire to help the grieving De Silva, and his need to keep his promise to Mala that he would not take any more revenge on the lowlifes of the town. Eventually, along with a concerted effort by Sher Khan to cheer up Vijay, Mala relents, vowing she will not try to control him, and says he must do what is right. The trail of tainted moonshine leads back to Teja and his men. Upon finally cornering the crook on Diwali, a firework bursting overhead, Vijay also finds out that the person, who murdered his parents, 20 years before, on the same night, is Teja, recognizable by the zanjeer on his wrist. Sher Khan helps him to fight Teja and his men, and take justice into their own hands, until the police arrive. When the hapless police inspector is held at gunpoint by Teja, Vijay manages to drop to retrieve a pistol from the ground, and shoots him dead, his body falling into the swimming pool.

The other popular film in which the female lead is shown as career oriented bold women who look after her family is ‘Sholay’ where the lead actress Hema Malini is a village tonga (horse carriage) driver. The film opens in the small village of Ramgarh, the retired policeman Thakur Baldev Singh (Sanjeev Kumar) summons a pair of small-time
thieves that he had once arrested. Thakur feels that the duo—Veeru (Dharmendra) and Jai (Amitabh Bachchan)—would be ideal to help him capture Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan), a dacoit wanted by the authorities for a INR 50,000 reward. Thakur tells them to surrender Gabbar to him, alive, for an additional INR 20,000 reward. The two thieves thwart the dacoits sent by Gabbar to extort the villagers. Soon afterwards, Gabbar and his goons attack Ramgarh during the festival of Holi. In a tough battle, Veeru and Jai are cornered. Thakur, although he has a gun within his reach, does not help them. Veeru and Jai fight back and the bandits flee. The two are, however, upset at Thakur's inaction, and consider leaving the village. Thakur explains that Gabbar had killed nearly all of his family members, and cut off both his arms a few years earlier, which is why he could not use the gun. He had concealed the dismemberment by always wearing a shawl.

Living in Ramgarh, the lively Veeru and cynical Jai find themselves growing fond of the villagers. Veeru is attracted to Basanti (Hema Malini), a feisty, talkative young woman who makes her living by driving a horse-cart. Jai is drawn to Radha (Jaya Bhaduri), Thakur's reclusive, widowed daughter-in-law, who subtly returns his affections. Skirmishes between Gabbar's gang and Jai-Veeru finally result in the capture of Veeru and Basanti by the dacoits. Jai attacks the gang, and the three are able to flee Gabbar's hideout with dacoits in pursuit. Fighting from behind a rock, Jai and Veeru nearly run out of ammunition. Veeru, unaware that Jai was wounded in the gunfight, is forced to leave for more ammunition. Meanwhile, Jai, who is continuing the gunfight singlehandedly, decides to sacrifice himself by using his last bullet to ignite dynamite sticks on a bridge from close range. Veeru returns, and Jai dies in his arms. Enraged, Veeru attacks Gabbar's den and catches the dacoit. Veeru nearly beats Gabbar to death when Thakur appears and reminds Veeru of the promise to hand over Gabbar alive. Thakur uses his spike-soled shoes to severely injure Gabbar and destroy his hands. The police then arrive and arrest Gabbar. After Jai's funeral, Veeru leaves Ramgarh and finds Basanti waiting for him on the train. Radha is left alone again.

When we talk about the career and strong characters played by the female Bollywood movies then the film ‘Trishul’ (1978) needs a special mention where both the female lead are shown as holding good positions in different fields of work. Hema Malini
as the general manager of a company, Rakhee as corporate secretary gives a message that women are not less than anyone in field. The Story of the movie revolves around Vijay (Amitabh Bachhan) who is the illegitimate son of a construction baron Raj Kumar Gupta (Sanjeev Kumar) and his first love Shanti (Waheeda Rehman), whom he gives up to marry a wealthy heiress. Shanti comes by to wish him success on his marriage, with the news that she is carrying his child and moving away. She gives birth to son Vijay and raises him into adulthood. After she dies, Vijay comes to Delhi to take revenge by destroying his father's business and family connections. Shekhar (Shashi Kapoor) and Kusum (Poonam Dhillon) are Vijay's half-siblings who are caught in the crossfire of Vijay's revenge. Vijay also crosses paths with Geeta (Raakhee), the devoted secretary of Gupta and another company's general manager Sheetal (Hema Malini) who is also the daughter of the owner of the company. When Geeta is fired Vijay hires her. He tries to create differences between Shekhar and Sheetal. Vijay also takes all the good deals which resulted in losses for Raj. He even encourages Kusum to marry Ravi (Sachin) against her father's wishes which enrages Shekhar and he ends up fighting with Vijay. But Geeta comes and tells the truth. Shekhar and Kusum leave Raj. Raj in anger tells Balwant (Prem Chopra) to kill Vijay. Later Vijay comes down and tells him that he is Raj's son and leaves. Raj tries to stop Balwant but he had already left and kidnapped Ravi in order to get to Vijay. Vijay, with the assistance of Shekhar and Raj, rescues Ravi. Balwant aims at Vijay but Raj comes in between and thus Raj is shot in the process by Balwant. Before dying Raj asks for forgiveness. Vijay forgives him and unites with the family. In addition, Vijay changes the name of his company from Shanti Constructions to Shanti-Raj Constructions.

But on the other hand movies like Aakhir kyun, can be good example of women empowerment. Nisha (Smrita Patil) is an orphaned child who has been adopted by her relatives and raised alongside her cousin, Indu (Tina Munim). As both cousins enter their 20s, Indu falls in love with the rich and good-looking Kabir (Rakesh Roshan). However, Kabir takes a liking to Nisha and to the dismay of Indu, marries Nisha, wanting an obedient and socially accepted wife moulding to the traditional conservative norms as Nisha constrained to, compared to Indu, who was liberal and progressive in her views and behavior. After marriage, all seems well in the life of Nisha and Kabir and soon, Nisha
becomes pregnant. Meanwhile, a happy Nisha is oblivious to Kabir's affairs and dalliance with several women, on the pretext of business trips.

Nisha's pregnancy is deemed as a complication by her doctor and upon the insistence of Indu's mother (Shubha Khote), Indu moves into Nisha and Kabir's home to take care of her. As Nisha becomes restricted in her daily activities, Indu gets closer to Kabir and engages in an extramarital affair with him, reviving her erstwhile attraction to him. Oblivious to these new changes, Nisha continues with her life and eventually delivers a girl. Upon return and realizing the affair between her husband and cousin, she is shattered and confronts Kabir and Indu. Kabir resists and refuses to end his affair and asks her to adjust to this change. Nisha refuses and leaves the house, handing her daughter's responsibilities to their house maid. In the new male-dominated world, Nisha struggles and meets with Alok (Rajesh Khanna). They quickly become friends and Alok develops feelings towards Nisha; but Nisha remains focused on her work and succeed as an author detailing her life struggles and the fight against it. On the other side, the relationship between Kabir and Indu remains stagnant, with their financial situation worsening and circumstances making them realize their mistakes. As Nisha and Kabir's daughter becomes of married age, a worried Kabir is unsure how he would afford such an alliance, but Nisha comes and rescues Kabir by selling him her publishing rights henceforth and forwarding the royalties to her marriage and life. Kabir apologizes for whatever happened and repents deeply, leaving Nisha to comment that she has moved on from her life and does not want her daughter to know her identity and the pain she might endure knowing her mother's fate. As their daughter is married, Alok meets with Nisha and tells her that it’s time for them to officiate their relation. As Nisha resists, still molding to her traditional values, Alok confronts with a question "AkhirKyon?" (Why So?) explaining that when she was going through marital troubles, society blamed her and refused to support her, so why worry about society. Hence, "Why So?". Alok applies sindoor and officiates his relationship with her.

The other film with a very strong female lead is Khoon Bhari Maang. Aarti Verma (Rekha) is a widow with two children. She is an unattractive woman with a large birthmark on her face. Aarti's husband died in a car accident under mysterious
circumstances, and her father (Saeed Jaffrey) is one of the richest and most famous businessmen in the city. However, when Aarti's father is murdered by his worker Hiralal (Kader Khan), Aarti's world is completely destroyed. She does not find any sense for her life, except bringing up her children. Hiralal pretends to be a friend, and takes care of her like a father. He brings his poor nephew Sanjay (Kabir Bedi) from abroad, who is also the lover of Aarti's best friend Nandini (Sonu Walia). Although Nandini loves Aarti, she is intensely in love with Sanjay, and after he requests her to help him; she finally agrees to help him rob Aarti of her wealth.

Slowly, Sanjay gets close to Aarti's children. Nandini and the rest of the family convince Aarti to marry Sanjay and finally, she marries him. The day after the wedding, Aarti, Sanjay and Nandini go on a short trip, in which Sanjay pushes Aarti from the rowboat into crocodile-infested waters, so that she dies, and he inherits her wealth. The crocodile mauls Aarti and mutilates her body and face. However, Aarti's body is not found and Sanjay cannot inherit the legacy until her body is found and her death is established beyond any doubt. As a result, the family is in a hysterical situation. Sanjay, out of frustrations becomes abusive to the children and Aarti's pets. While all of this is occurring, Aarti is found adrift by an old farmer, who rescues her.

A few months later, the horribly-disfigured Aarti decides to return to her city and avenge herself and her family. She exchanges her expensive diamond earrings for a huge amount of money, using the money to pay for extensive plastic surgery, and becomes a stunningly beautiful woman, very different from her earlier self. Aarti then changes her name to Jyoti and finds a job as a model in the same agency where Nandini works as well. Now a new person with a new identity, her goal is to conquer Sanjay as a stranger, and kill him in the same way as he had tried to kill her. Aarti, now "reincarnated" as Jyoti, goes on a dangerous journey of murder and revenge, and she will not be satisfied until she regains her home, family and dignity.

From Rekha followed by Madhuri Dixit and Karisma Kapoor, the woman in commercial Hindi films became louder in every sense – voice, articulation and delivery of dialogue, sexual aggressiveness and terms of character. This trend continues in a much
more aggressive way carried forward in its well-packaged globalized image by the present crop comprised of Aishwarya Rai, Preity Zinta, Priyanka Chopra, Kareena Kapoor, Rani Mukherjee, Kajol and so on. They just do not agree to play contented sugary characters that are predicted to wave their eyelashes and turn into glycerine factories at the wave of the director’s hand. Madhuri was decorative to start with but changed over gradually and progressively with Tezaab followed by films like Beta, Dil, Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge culminating in Mrityudand.

Actresses like Vidya Balan, Tabu have struck a balance among glamour and convention helped by their looks and the image they present. The woman is stronger, almost equal to a man in current films such as Dhoom, Dhoom II, Shaurya, Aitraaz where there is almost no difference between the heroine and the vamp because all the female stars are willing to step into negative roles if they are strong and can make a lasting impression on the audience. Into the 2000 however, one is constrained to point out that most of the high-budget Hindi films that rely greatly on direct marketing by the stars, are either blatant or clever remakes of Hollywood films, both hits and flops. Thus the portrayal of the woman is also a ‘borrowed’ portrayal that is greatly distanced from the Indian woman on the street, urban or rural, educated or not educated, working or non-working and so on. Ethical values have changed to a large extent too because premarital sex, adultery, sexual overtures where the woman takes the initiative are quite common and have also got audience acceptance. Otherwise films like Astitva and Gangster and Jism and actresses like Bipasha Basu and Kangna Ranaut would never have clicked the way they have.

3.3 FEMALE IN LEAD ROLE IN PARALLEL CINEMA

The Indian New Wave, commonly known in India as Art Cinema or Parallel Cinema as an alternative to the mainstream commercial cinema has also reflected the changed faces of Indian women. Hence, Art cinema is a specific movement in Indian cinema, known for its serious content, pragmatism and naturalism, with a keen eye on the socio-political climate of the times. In the past there were women who played progressive
roles and it is visible through the characterization of women in various arts movies that are known for realistic treatment and portrayal breaking social norms. One of the earliest art movies that we can refer for its portrayal of woman as a strong individual is V. Shantaram film *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) that critiqued the treatment of women in Indian society. It is made with such stark realism and simplicity that it takes your breath away, and the social commentary at the heart of the film seems to be way before its time. The protagonist Shanta Apte shines as Neera, a young girl forcibly married to a wealthy widower old enough to be her father. He begins as a selfish and not so sympathetic figure who, evolves into an object of pity, hoping that this marriage will make him feel young again, and loved but it doesn’t quite work out that way. Neera flatly refuses to consummate her marriage, and sets up her own room in a warehouse which had been used as storage. She is full of righteous indignation, and never loses an opportunity to shame her new husband or his aunt. Secure in the knowledge that she has the moral upper hand and nothing left to lose, she is implacable; plus, she makes full use of her considerable intellect in outsmarting their attempts to force her into being a “proper” wife and refuses to apply the vermillion to her forehead. The film slams the very idea of being Indian women submissive to every situation against her wishes and shows her as an individual (Memsaab Story, 2009).

There are various Art films that can be remarked as path breaking with women playing strong and powerful characters and not just glamorous decorative items. One of the examples in such powerful portrayal is *Arth* (1982) starring Shabana Azmi as Pooja, who grew up as an orphan girl shatters when it is revealed that her husband is in love with another woman. When her husband deserts Pooja for another, she chooses to leave his house for a women's hostel with only 2000 rupees that she had when she got married. She is helped by Raj to surpass the difficulties of life as a single person, to find a job and to rely morally on herself. Raj and Pooja become good friends Raj falls in love with Pooja and proposes to her. She refuses saying she is empty and cannot give him anything. Raj tries to persuade her saying that she cannot spend the rest of her life feeling miserable about the past and that she should try to find a new life for herself. Pooja promises to think about it. Towards the end her husband faces rejection from the women for whom he
left his wife and tries to revive his relation with Pooja, but is rejected. Meanwhile Pooja finds her way to live with her maid's orphan daughter and refuses to marry Raj saying that she has found a new meaning to life in being independent and being a mother to the child and marrying Raj will only weaken her (Filmi Geek, 2006).

Other movie like *Bhumika* tells the life story of an actress, Usha (Smita Patil), who is the granddaughter of a famous female singer of the old tradition from Devadasi community of Goa. Usha’s mother is married to an abusive and alcoholic Brahmin. Following his early death, and over her mother’s objections, Usha is taken to Bombay by family hanger-on Keshav Dalvi (Amol Palekar) to audition successfully as a singer in a Bombay studio: the first step in a process, watched approvingly by Usha’s doting grandmother and with horror by her mother, that will eventually carry her to on-camera adolescent stardom, and to an ill-starred love marriage with Keshav. Usha’s motives for stubbornly pursuing this relationship (culminating in a pre-marital pregnancy) with the unattractive and much older Keshav — who appears to have lusted after her since childhood — are not spelled out. Presumably she feels indebted to him for his loyalty to her family (of which he frequently reminds her) and for her own worldly success; she is also a headstrong girl who clearly enjoys her acting career and is bent on challenging her uptight mother (who opposes the match because Keshav does not belong to their caste, just as she opposes cinema itself because of its presumed un-respectability).

Once the two are wed, Usha is shocked to find Keshav continuing to act as her “business manager”, (After effects) arranging starring roles for her opposite heartthrob Rajan (Anant Nag), who is himself in (unrequited) love with her. Since Keshav’s other business ventures are unsuccessful, the family remains entirely dependent on Usha’s earnings — a fact that Keshav clearly resents. He thus becomes both a jealous husband with a fragile ego and nasty temper, as well as (in effect) a greedy pimp who compels his wife to take risqué work despite her dislike of her co-star and her protests that she “only wants to be a housewife” now that their daughter has been born. Not surprisingly, the relationship becomes increasingly poisoned; particularly by Keshav’s suspicion (fed by star-magazine gossip) that she is having an affair with Rajan. Verbally and physically abused by her husband and periodically obliged to live in a hotel, separated from her
daughter and mother, the desperately unhappy actress eventually does instigate two unsatisfying liaisons: with the nihilistic and self-centred director Sunil Verma (Naseeruddin Shah), with whom she plots a double-suicide (which he foils), and then with the wealthy businessman Vinayak Kale (Amrish Puri), who keeps her as a pampered mistress on his palatial estate. Here Usha briefly finds a kind of “respectability” as a de facto second wife, earning a measure of love and admiration from Kale’s mother, son, and bedridden first wife — but (as she learns one day when she tries to take the boy to a nearby fair) at the cost of even the most rudimentary freedom. Unable to abide by Kale’s hypocritical domestic rules, she finds her only hope of escape in the intervention of the hated Keshav, who promptly brings her back to a Bombay festooned with billboards of her own face, and to the same drab hotel and lonely prospects. As Kale’s bitter wife remarks to Usha as the latter prepares to leave, “The beds change, the kitchens change. Men’s masks change, but men don’t change. The movie does not clarify the reason why Usha likes, and then dislikes Rajan. The climax of the movie is gloomy, and the viewers are left on their own, to seek its message.

Ankur is a film that analyzes human behavior in general and heavily stresses characterization (though the story is not fictional). The story revolves around two characters, Lakshmi and Surya. Ankur is also there. Lakshmi (Shabana Azmi) lives in a village with her husband Kishtayya (Sadhu Meher), a deaf-mute Dalit alcoholic potter who communicates using gestures. At the beginning of the film, during a village festival, she claims (in a prayer to the village goddess) that her only desire is to have a child. Surya (Anant Nag), the son of the village landlord, has just finished his studies in the nearby city of Hyderabad. Surya’s father (Khader Ali Beg) has a mistress named Kaushalya to whom, he claims, he “gave the best land in the village.” They have an illegitimate son named Pratap. The landlord forces his legitimate son into a child marriage with Saru (Priya Tendulkar). Because Surya must wait until Saru "comes of age," he begins to feel sexually frustrated. He is then forced to administer his share of land in the village. He is to stay in an old house, and Lakshmi and Kishtayya are to act as his servants. Not long after his arrival, he begins introducing a number of measures (often controversial). For example, on his second day in the village, Surya (who already finds
Lakshmi attractive) has Lakshmi cook his meals and make tea. This disappoints the village priest, who is accustomed to delivering food to the landowner, though at a higher price than Lakshmi asks. On the same day, Surya also hires Kishtayya to ride his bullock cart and go on errands. The following day, he has Kishtayya collect fertilizer from the landlord's house. Surya uses Kishtayya's absence to try to flirt with Lakshmi but fails. In the meantime, the villager's gossip, and many (most notably the overseer, Police Patel Sheikh Chand) believe that Surya has already slept with Lakshmi and will treat her the same way the landlord treated Kaushalya: try to conceal the scandal by giving the mistress a plot of land.

Kishtayya is caught stealing toddy, after which he is publicly humiliated. He then leaves the village one night. In his absence, Surya and Lakshmi sleep together. A few days later, Saru arrives at the village. Saru does not approve of Lakshmi's presence, partly because Lakshmi is a Dalit and partly because Saru has heard the villagers' rumors. The next morning, Lakshmi begins suffering from morning sickness. Saru sacks her, claiming that she is too sick to work. Many days later, Kishtayya returns, having cured himself of his alcoholism and made some money. Lakshmi is overwhelmed with a feeling of guilt, because she believes that she has betrayed her husband. On discovering Lakshmi's pregnancy, he salutes the village goddess at her temple. He then decides to try to ride the bullock cart again but carries a stick as he approaches Surya. Surya sees Kishtayya and mistakenly believes that Kishtayya is seeking revenge from him. Surya has three men hold Kishtayya and then proceeds to whip him with a rope used for lynching. The commotion attracts others (including Sheikh Chand and Pratap) to the scene, and Lakshmi rushes to defend her husband. She angrily curses Surya, then slowly returns home with Kishtayya. In the final scene, after the others have left, a child throws a stone at Surya's glass window and runs away, and this is the 'Seedling'

*Mirch Masala*, The film is set in Colonial India in the early 1940s. The plot begins with an arrogant subedar (Naseeruddin Shah) (local tax collector in colonial India) and his henchmen rampaging through a village. The subedar has an eye for women and soon spots Sonbai (Smita Patil) on the riverbank. Sonbai is an intelligent, beautiful and strong woman. Her confidence intrigues the subedar. It turns out subedar holds ultimate
authority over the village. Subservient to him is the mukhi (Suresh Oberoi) (village chieftain) and all the villagers. The villagers do their best to scratch out a living, of which the subedar invariably exacts a heavy tax. We learn also that the villagers are mostly illiterate and ignorant of the outside world. The subedar and his men routinely attack the village and raid the food, livestock and supplies. The subedar is a haughty and cruel man. He exploits his power in every possible way. The villagers are compelled to keep him satisfied; they regularly set up parties for him and his men, often at great expense to their meager means. They also arrange a steady supply of women for his pleasure.

The mukhi means well but is generally weak and powerless before the subedar. His principal goals are to negotiate concessions to the tax and to keep the subedar happy. The safety and security of the village are mostly dependent on the moods of the subedar, and so he tacitly arranges to keep the subedar sated and out of his way. The mukhi also represents the prevailing male attitude in the village: women are mostly confined to their homes and have no education. Things take a turn when on one such occasion he boldly asks Sonbai to yield to his desires. Equally bold, she slaps him across his face. She flees immediately with the soldiers in hot pursuit. She takes refuge in a masala karkhana (spice factory where red chillies are ground into powder). Abu Mian (Om Puri), the wizened old guard Muslim gatekeeper of the factory admits Sonbai and slams the factory doors shut in the nick of time. The matter is escalated. The mukhi convenes the village panchayat. The villagers are quick to condemn Sonbai and decide that she must turn herself over to the subedar.

The mukhi brings pressure on Sonbai but she stands firm. Within the factory, the women who once supported Sonbai now turn upon her. They fear that if she does not yield then the subedar may send his men to indiscriminately molest the womenfolk. Sonbai nearly relents, but is stopped by Abu Mian. She resolves to stand firm. Abu Mian chides the mukhi and the villagers: they may lord over their wives at home, but are not man enough to face the subedar, leaving Abu Mian himself as the only man in the village who has the courage to back his convictions. The subedar orders his soldiers to charge the factory. They smash down the door. The subedar enters the factory and tries to grab Sonbai. The women of the factory mount a sudden and surprising defence. They attack
the subedar with fistfuls of mirch masala (fresh ground red chilli powder). The film ends with the subedar on his knees, screaming in pain as the chilli burns his face and eyes.

Another remarkable and classical movie that tells about the different facets of a woman through a single character, that understands the intricacies of a male dominant society. *UmraoJaan* (1981) is a story of a woman who was forced to face the world in her adolescence, is kidnapped from her family and sold to an owner of a brothel, where she trains courtesans. The girl renamed as UmraoJaan, learns to read, write, dance, sing, and charm wealthy men. She is a cultured woman trained to captivate men of wealth and taste. A grown-up UmraoJaan (Rekha) catches the eye of a Sultan, and the two falls in love. But Nawab must marry to please his family, and Umrao's heart is broken. She meets a dashing bandit chieftain, who woos and wins her. She flees with her dacoit, hoping to marry him and leave the world of the courtesan far behind. But her lover is killed by local police and she is left alone, with no choice but to return to her old life. Soon, the British attack the city and the residents are forced to flee. Umrao's party of refugees stops in a small village. The residents ask the courtesan to sing and dance. Umrao, looking about her, realizes that this is her town, her family, the place from which she was kidnapped. She had been so young when kidnapped that she had forgotten, but now it all returns to her. She sings the song, “Yeh kya jagah hai doston?” (What kind of place is this, friends?), a veiled reference to her feelings of dismay at being treated like a pariah entertainer by her very own people. After, she meets her mother and younger brother, who had thought that she was dead. Her mother would be happy to welcome her back into the family, but her brother forbids it she is tainted by her profession and must not return to embarrass them. At the end of the film, Umrao returns to the now-deserted and looted brothel in Lucknow and finds she is left alone, with nothing but her profession and her poetry (Cineplot.com, 2010).

*Astitva*, This film is about the issues like male chauvinist protagonism, extramarital affairs, and spousal abuse. It is about a woman trying to find a separate identity outside her marriage. It is 1997. Malhar Kamat (Mohnish Bahl), an old musician and music teacher, is dying. Upon his death two years later, the will is delivered to Aditi (Tabu). When the will reaches Aditi in Pune, she is in the midst of an impromptu lunch
party occasioned by the arrival of Dr. Ravi Bapat (RavindraMankani) and his wife Meghna (Smita Jaykar). Ravi is a very close friend of Aditi’s husband, ShrikantPandit (SachinKhedekar). Aditi’s son Aniket (Sunil Barve) introduces his girlfriend and would-be wife Revati (NamrataShirodkar).

Shrikant opens the certified letter package with the will even though it is addressed to Aditi, much to Meghna's chagrin and Ravi’s surprise. Shrikant is intrigued and decides to consult his daily diaries where he has chronicled the events of his daily life. Shrikant realizes that he overlooked certain things anybody else could have easily noticed. He understands that 25 years ago Aditi could not have possibly been pregnant, at least not from him. He shows her the diary, confronts her with the facts and demands explanation. In a flashback Shrikant is an up-and-coming star at a firm, seeking to break out onto his own. His work keeps him traveling almost constantly. This leaves his newlywed wife Aditi lonely and frustrated. When she asks him to let her work someplace (clearly to relieve her boredom and find a good use for her time), he takes it as an insult and rebuffs her saying no woman in his family has ever worked outside the home and that he earns enough for them to live comfortably. He suggests (although not very enthusiastically) that she take up music. The music teacher is Malhar Kamat. Shrikant continues his unending travels all over the world, although he makes it clear to Malhar that music will not be anything more than a hobby for Aditi.

Aditi’s sister Sudha (Resham Seth) and her husband come to live with Aditi. Their constant lovemaking further deepens Aditi’s feelings of yearning and abandonment. And one spring afternoon, as Malhar breaks into his new ghazal in the rain, Aditi’s resolve is broken under the influence of the season. Malhar returns a couple of days later, and Aditi asks him to leave. Aditi has missed a period. Sudha learns this and advises her to do something. When Shrikant returns, Aditi breaks down and tries to tell him the truth about her pregnancy. But Shrikant is doubly elated, having won the first major contract for his own firm and, hearing of his imminent fatherhood, and breaks out into celebrations without letting Aditi complete her story. As the story comes back to present time, Shrikant punishes Aditi by making her tell the truth in front of Aniket, Ravi and Meghna. Meghna loathes Shrikant, since she suffered spousal abuse from her drunkard husband.
before divorcing him and marrying Ravi. Aniket is disgusted with his mother after knowing the truth of his existence. Shrikant decides that he will live with Aditi, but any spousal relationship between them will not exist. After Revati knows the truth, she breaks the engagement, not because of the truth, but because she realizes that Aniket is no different than the man whom he considered his father till now. Meghna decides to take Aditi to Goa with her, but Aditi declines. She walks out of the house with Revati. The movie ends with Revati and Aditi walking out the house and on the road, whilst Shri and Aniket stand in the doorway, watching them go. The denouement captures the essence of astitva.

One thing that is common in these movies is the characterization of the lead actress as the independent and confident individuals who can think, take decisions as well as pave their way through difficult situations without depending upon others.