



Representation of Gender and Female Sexuality: An Analysis of Selected 'Controversial' Hindi Films of the 21st century

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Abstract

India is one of the world's largest film-producing and film-viewing nations. Yet, very little focus has been placed on the subject on the female gender and their sexuality. This research paper focuses on films like Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996), Shonali Bose's *Margarita With a Straw* (2015), Leena Yadav's *Parched* (2016), Alankrita Shrivastava's *Lipstick Under my Burkha* (2017) dealing with the 'taboo' cis-female sexuality. These films received immense criticism and backlash for choosing to subvert the gaze and focusing on controversial things like masturbation, homo-sexual love and sexuality in 'differently-abled', heterosexual sex workers, the meaning of a woman's sexual consent and sex beyond the constraints of marriage. These films reflect the Indian woman's unrestrained exploration of her sexuality along with the intersections of Class, Gender and Patriarchy. The reason for taking these films is their unflinching approach of putting female sexual desire at their forefront and allows their female protagonists to breathe as independent sexual creatures. The researcher also tries to show how the nuancing patriarchy or the hetero-patriarchy couldn't 'veil' these 'women' characters. The paper aims at starting a dialogue about the subject, to push the existing boundaries and think beyond the prescribed 'norm'.

Keywords: Bollywood; Sexuality; *Parched*; *Fire*; *Burkha*; Banned films

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Introduction

Female Sexuality is 'veiled' for the audience of the world's largest film-producing and film-viewing nation, India.

Women in India are conditioned into what is 'accepted' and what is 'unaccepted' in the society. A child growing up within the patriarchal society is often hushed by the parents as sex and sexuality remain something which isn't openly talked about in front of families. It is something which is to be 'discovered behind closed doors'. Also, women are seen as domestic creatures. They are seen as someone who isn't allowed to step beyond the 'Laxman-Rekha' of their houses. This domestication of women leads to the idea that the existence of a woman's identity is in reference to a man, and that man can be any member of the family. Basically, a woman's identity is either being a daughter, a sister, a wife or a mother. That results in the loss of identity or existence of that gender, here, the female gender. Therefore, the concept of sex as a means of pleasure for women is quite 'unaccepted' and 'non-existent' as the existence of a woman is itself muted or blurred and when a woman decides to unmute herself and express her sexual desires; it brings her 'moral'

character under scrutiny and an eventual categorization into the virgin-whore paradigm.

Women have often been stereotyped. They are seen as objects of desire rather than the ones having desires. The patriarchal framework points out the dynamics of power where the man is the provider and the woman is the receiver. This power play is also prevalent in a typical heterosexual couple's sexual activities. So a man, who has grown up in an extensively patriarchal conditioning, would always want to be the dominating sexual partner among the two. His desires and dominance would overshadow that of the woman's. Also, for a patriarchal society to thrive, it is important to keep the subject-object status of a man and woman in place. "A woman blurs out her status as a docile object the moment she expresses desire and so, the society does everything in its might to curb it; often taking the disguise of religious or moral ideologies." (Gupta). Women's problems are aggravated when it encompasses not only gender and economic deprivation but also discrimination associated with religion, caste, and untouchability, which in turn results in the denial of their social, economic, cultural, and political rights. They become vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation due to their gender and caste. Women

also become victims of abhorrent social and religious practices such as devadasi/jogini (temple prostitution), resulting in sexual exploitation in the name of religion.

With sex being a male bastion in India, in Bollywood particularly, women are often objectified in item numbers, and sex is portrayed either in a crass manner (Mastizaade, Grand Masti to name a few) or an overtly erotic way (Raaz, Jism to name a few). Very little focus has been placed on the subject of women and their sexuality and the few films that have dared to explore the subject of female sexuality and independence in a serious, non-conventional manner, have, naturally, caused quite a stir from the general public and the Censor Board.

There are films like Deepa Mehta's *Fire* [1], Shonali Bose's *Margarita With a Straw* [2], Leena Yadav's *Parched* [3] and Alankrita Shrivastava's *Lipstick Under my Burkha* [4] dealing with the taboo of female sexuality, also the subject of the research. The reason for taking these films is their unflinching approach of putting female sexual desire at their forefront and allows their female protagonists to breathe as independent sexual creatures. From conversations on masturbation, celebrating lesbian love, the passions of female sex-workers, the meaning of a woman's sexual consent to enjoying sex beyond the constraints of marriage, these films reflect the Indian woman's unrestrained exploration of her sexuality along with the intersections of Class, Gender and Patriarchy.

Why these Movies were Termed 'Controversial'

When it is said that films are a mirror to the society, why when it's to be showcased to the audience, becomes 'controversial'?

So, what exactly is 'controversial' and why were these films banned initially before release? According to the researcher, they challenged the set 'standards' of the 'patriarchal' society or went against those 'standards' or well, set some new 'standards' and above all, were not 'culturally relevant'.

Now, what are these 'standards'? As we know, India is a patriarchal society and those 'standards' come from the roots of our culture, where male-domination is a norm. However, as time has progressed, India is moving away from the male dominated culture but discrimination is still highly visible in rural as well as in urban areas, throughout all strata of society. While women are guaranteed equality under the constitution, legal protection has a limited effect, where patriarchal traditions prevail.

These movies broke the stereotypes set for women in cinema and also broke the barriers of the society in voicing out for women and what made it more controversial was, the voice also came from women, i.e., women actors as well as women directors. Looking at each movie individually.

Fire

Starting with *Fire*, a movie way ahead of its times, showcased a lesbian relationship sketched in the backdrop of an Indian middle class family. The film had won several accolades in the countries like USA and Europe but here, in India, the release created quite a

stir also resulting in a lot of protests and the film said to be against the 'Indian Culture'. Quoting the Chief Minister Manohar Joshi, "The film's theme is alien to our culture".

In December 1998, a small group of protesters halted the screening of *Fire* in two Mumbai theatres. The following day a similar group attacked a theatre in New Delhi where *Fire* was being viewed. In both cities, the protesters were primarily women affiliated with the Shiv Sena. They also held that the movie's storyline would spoil Indian women and would lead to the collapse of marriage as an institution. According to the reports, the protestors who hadn't even seen the movie, thought it was an attack to the culture of India and thus, necessary to be fought against.

If anything, the broader issue of freedom of expression and tolerance had got derailed by the lesbian debate. As a surprised Mehta said, "I can't have my film hijacked by any one organization. It is not about lesbianism. It's about loneliness, about choices". The protests emerge from the fact that control over female sexuality constitutes the central concern of many of these issues although associating patriarchy as a measure to justify the film and its theme could effectively pitch in the presupposition that women's oppression is solely and directly related to the denial of choice in her sexuality.

Margarita with a Straw

An independent woman with cerebral palsy who chooses to embrace her sexuality and seeks for an identity of her own is already enough threat to the 'Moral' guidelines which the Censor Board of India follows for making the cuts in a movie. Reportedly the Film Certification Board had asked the makers of the film to edit certain scenes some of which include a 12 seconds long kiss between the lead characters, a scene where Kalki is seen showing her middle finger and a scene where Kalki has been helped to remove her undergarments and she is shown peeing. Also, the court of Bangalore had banned the film from screening as the authorities expressed their disapproval over the content of the movie. Laila watches porn, uses a friend to assuage her frustration and even has sex with a woman. Exploring a woman's sexuality in an Indian film is taboo and thus makes this film controversial.

Parched

A film which was judged by the leaked lovemaking scene before the release of the movie. The actors had to come out and talk about how the film was much more than the nude scenes and dealt with the issues of child marriage, patriarchy and sexuality. It also explores the relationship between women and how as opposed to the patriarchal notion, women support women.

Lipstick under my Burkha

The film which got a lot of attention before the release because of its battle with the Central Board for Film Certification (CBFC) refused to certify it. A copy of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) letter to the film's producer Prakash Jha states: "The story is lady oriented, their fantasy about life. There are continuous sexual scenes, abusive words, audio pornography and a bit sensitive touch about one particular section of society, hence film refused under guidelines."

Lipstick under My Burkha's content is bold i.e bold in respect to the coy nature of mainstream Indian cinema which has, since time immemorial, been concerned with the male gaze. Where Indian mainstream cinema pivots around women objectified (as sexual beings) or deified (as virtuous women), Lipstick under My Burkha paints its four female protagonists as real, earthy characters with their idiosyncratic dreams, fantasies and ambitions-something which has clearly threatened the parochial mindset of the censor board. (Ghosh, Indiatoday)

According to the reports in The Times of India, a group of Muslim leaders in Bhopal passed a resolution advocating the boycott of 'Lipstick Under My Burkha' and asked the central government to ban the movie for hurting the community's religious sentiments. The All India Muslim Tehwar Committee also disclosed plans to take legal action against the movie. According to reports, the reason for their anger was the film mocked Islamic culture and that nobody had the right to talk about a woman's choice of wearing the burkha in a negative way.

These movies caused a lot of stir because they talk about the issues that women face openly. They celebrate something which isn't even acknowledged in the society, i.e., sexuality and desires of women. These films though released in different years and tracing the stories of different individuals, share many commonalities and intersections between them. Next, we see these intersections in detail [5-7].

Class, Gender and Patriarchy

The complex interplay of exploitation, agency, and expressions of desire or sexuality can be seen in all the four movies [8].

Starting with Patriarchy, Fire focuses on the women of the middle-class Hindu family (thus, the class) named Radha and Sita. Radha serves the household as women who has been brought up in a patriarchal household and thinks it's her duty and she should fulfill her responsibilities of taking care of Ashok, her husband's business and family. We can also see the same in various scenes where Radha takes care of Biji and also manages the store that the family runs. Ashok has taken a vow of celibacy because Radha can't reproduce and also to "seek union with the universal truth". He is also a rigid patriarch who thinks that it's a wife's duty to take care of the needs of husband and his family. Swamiji, the one that Ashok thinks of as his Guru, preaches that, "Desire night is the love of power. Aspiration light is the power of love." Ashok, thus, comes to firmly believe that, "Desire is the root of all evil". When his wife questions him about how his vow helps her, he replies, "By helping me, you're doing your duty as my wife."

Talking about duty, Radha had taken care of Ashok's mother all her life but when the members of the family come to know about the relationship between the two sister-in-laws, Ashok's mother spits on Radha's face showing her disgust. So, even after serving all her life, she doesn't get acceptance of what gives her happiness from the patriarchal family. Here, we also see Biji as the embodiment of the rigidity of the patriarchal household. The expectations that she has from the Bahu's are to take care of her sons, her and her family. She has a 24/7 caretaker but also expects from her Bahu's to take care of her. She doesn't like and rings the bell given to her

too many a times when Sita on the very first day of her arrival in the house, comes out wearing a blouse and jeans in front of her and Radha. She expects them to behave in a certain 'traditional' way and be as a woman in the heteropatriarchy should behave like. But the way these two women choose to act, like the sensual massage in front of the family members in the picnic location or subverting the tradition of Karva Chauth, or putting themselves and their desires above everyone in the end, they not only somewhere defy that heteropatriarchy and place themselves somewhere between both the non-normative patriarchy and non-heteronormativity.

On the other hand, we see Sita, an educated woman who enters the house as Radha's Sister in Law, who subverts the patriarchy in many ways and convinces Radha to start a new life with her. Jatin, Sita's husband has only married her because his girlfriend refused to marry him because she would feel suffocated in a "joint-family". Here, the "joint-family" also represents the class and the Indian culture. As Indian culture is known to put emphasis on a system where everyone in the family lives together and share their ups and downs. But, more people living together also means more work and sharing of the money that comes in the house too and also the dividing of responsibilities. The reflection of the same can be seen in Lipstick under My Burkha too, as the colony they live in represent both class and Indian culture too. Julie, also tells Jatin about how she doesn't want the 'excitement of the chase' go out of their relationship and that being one of the reasons why she didn't get married to him.

Even after the marriage, we see Jatin having a relationship with Julie and carried forward in Sita's knowledge. She surrendering to the patriarchal norms on not bringing shame to her family accepts Jatin's affair and keeps mum about it. But here her silence can be seen as a protest in itself. She subverts the patriarchy by also refusing to have sex with Jatin as it's more mechanical and 'to fulfill his duties of a husband' rather than out of any other feelings.

Sita is sitting on the bed, listening to his self-absorbed monologue and when he asks her what she thinks again, she replies, "I think you're a pompous fool! You heard me. Fool" [9,10]. Jatin slaps her. And she slaps him back (an act that subverts the patriarchy). However, he attempts to co-opt and patronize her action by commenting on his surprise that his demure little wife would turn out to be a firecracker, adding that he likes his women to have spirit. He forcibly kisses her and leaves (which also implies how sex is used as a show of power and control over a woman). Later, when Radha and Sita are on the terrace, hanging clothes out on a line, Radha sees the bruise from Sita's exchange with Jatin and asks if it hurts. Sita replies, "I'm treated like a household pet. And I take it. That's what hurts." Radha takes Sita into her arms to comfort her.

Also, here's how gender works. The rules for a man and a woman are different. A man is allowed to have sexual relationship outside of a marriage and no questioning would be done on him, but if a woman seeks the same, she'll be placed in the whore category. After the dialogue below is said by Radha, Ashok slaps her and calls her a prostitute [9].

"Brings ruin. Does it, Ashok? You know that without desire, I was dead. Without desire there's no point in living. You know what else? I desire to live. I desire Sita. I desire her warmth, her compassion, her body. I desire to live again. If you want to control desire, ask for Swamiji's help, not mine."

Her final goodbye to Ashok is Radha's departure from abiding to the cultural and gendered rules that disabled her from being whom she was always meant to be. The good thing about this film is that it is not about women against men, but women against oppressive structures and sends out a message for solidarity and the choice to 'choose' the companionship that you seek.

Same can be seen in lipstick under my burkha, the women don't revolt against men.

In Lipstick under my Burkha, all the four women – Usha a.k.a "Buaji", Rehana, Shireen and Leela who dare to dream and have their own individual fights against the society in order to not surrender and fulfill their dreams. This open ended movie gives the audience the space for interpretation and building their own end, the space which the patriarchal society doesn't offer as it dictates the end. Also, when religion is such a huge thing in India-the characters of this film belong to both Hindu and Muslim, the religions majorly pitted against each other, to make it known to the audience that Patriarchy doesn't bound itself to any certain religion, or any particular class.

While Shirin (played by Sen Sharma) and Rehana (Borthakur)'s characters wear burkhas in the film, the garment holds a uniquely different meaning for each. "At her age and in her circumstances, Shirin wears what she needs to wear," says Sen Sharma about her character. "Since she picks her battles, she doesn't question the burkha, but uses it to her own advantage."

On the other hand, the burkha is oppressive for Rehana, and she finds freedom in her tees and boots. "While the clothes she wears are smart," shares Borthakur, "They have that small-town feel to it. Her clothes reflect her efforts to fit into the 'in' crowd at college."

Here the two Muslim protagonists, both burkha-clad women are using it as a powerful weapon to shoplift or spy. It basically serves as a tool for anonymity whenever it serves their purpose. Stealing also a reference to the class and the religious restrictions placed on Rehana, but she gets what she wants using the same tool that is used to suppress her. Meanwhile, Usha wants the same anonymity when she goes to the mall to buy the swimming costume.

For Leela, her backless kurtas are also a representation of her rebellious nature as she wears those and rides on scooters on the roads of Bhopal. A form of manifestation and shattering of all those awkwardness and self-image issues can also be seen in Usha when she donnes a colorful swimming costume. Here, Kurta's and the saree that both the characters wear also represent the Indian culture but the twists that these characters give to them, also is in a way subverting the patriarchy and rebelling against it with their clothes.

Even belonging to the same religion and wearing the same clothes, the patriarchy takes different forms when it comes to

oppression and liberation from the same structures.

The character that Ratna Pathak plays has forgotten her actual first name as the only name that she is referred to as is "Buaji". That also meant restricting her identity to one particular relation in which she is placed to the society. She is always seen in this motherly light and thus, giving to the family and not having any dreams and desires of her own. Though, the narrative that is also by the same character from an erotica 'Lipstick Waale Sapney', presents the sexual desires and the intimacy that Usha wants from her life. The narrative talks about those untalked desires of women and also the existence of the sexual desires. The scene where she masturbates while having phone sex, also goes parallel to what is happening in the narrative. She is treated badly and told to get out of the house when her family comes to know about her wearing a swimsuit, trying to manipulate a guy and reading those erotica pieces. But isn't this how patriarchy works by disowning you they again try to claim their authority and control over a woman or also emphasizing that the society is now letting over their control and well so called support from the women by disowning them or public shaming them.

Earlier in the film, we see how Usha functions as the decision-making power center of 'Hawai-manzil' but that relation changes when she is thrown out of her own house and accesses no power over anything. The men that actually throw her out of her own house, have been brought up by her and in the process of disowning her are also claiming the hetero-patriarchy. They also point out how Usha should have atleast cared about her age if not about their reputation. True too for Rehana's father, when he bails her out of the jail and brings home and tells her to stop going to college from the next day, as culturally she has violated the 'tehzib'. Would Rehana have been viewed in a different light if she would've stolen for different social reasons, and not selfish reasons of fulfilling her desires? In the end, it's all about authority, control over someone and the emphasis of that control with power. When looked from the hetero-patriarchal structures, Power lies with the men of the houses and that is also visible in portrayal of men in the movie.

Shireen, who is married and restricted to stay at home and raise her children by her husband, dreams of becoming a successful saleswoman and in the absence of her husband, she also works in the direction of fulfilling that dream. Her husband doesn't acknowledge the existence of female sexuality and desires and uses sex as an instrument to emphasize his control over Shireen and to make her know who has the power in the relationship. She is raped every single time by her husband, both physically and emotionally. "Her adulterous husband for daring to go out and work – the pervasive rhetorical-visual symbol of the 'burkha' becomes a signifier of both oppression and mutability, self-abnegation and reclamation of desire. The 'burkha', it seems, is both the prison and its only escape – in that it allows these two women the right to transgress roles and appropriate desires. Similarly, Shireen's experience of routine sexual violence in marriage and her inability to seek divorce despite proof of her husband's infidelity owe to a manipulated 'contractuality' of most Muslim marriages. Though, as opposed to the Hindu notion of marriage as 'sacrament', the nikah-nama legislates wedlock

as a civil contract between consenting individuals – the terms and conditions that apportion the relative extent of ‘consent’ are often, in practice, decided by the man” (Bhattacharya and Ramdev)

Leela, the one in charge of taking her own decisions is stuck between two guys the one she wants to marry and dreams of travelling the world with and the one with whom her family wants her to get married to. She also doesn’t want to stop working after her marriage and doesn’t hesitate in fulfilling her sexual desires. Also, pressurized by the poverty stricken mother and the society, leaves all her dreams behind and decides to marry the guy her family chose for her but he leaves her for her past and because of the videos she had taken while having sex. In process of creating her identity and doing what she wants, the society tries to chain her in the end, she follows her heart. “The analogical inclusion of a couple of Hindu female protagonists (“Buaji” Usha Parmar and Leela) within the diegetic canvas achieves more than a formal equivalence of patriarchal prejudice across communities. Lipstick goes on to clearly place a finger at the exact sites of gendered violence within Hindu codes of personal-familial legislation. That Leela’s mother is forced into working as a nude model in the city’s art studios, for 17 years since her husband’s death, owes to her inheritance of the insoluble debts incurred by way of marriage” (Bhattacharya and Ramdev) [11]

Rehana, who dreams of becoming a pop star, is chained by the norms of the society and put under a veil. She goes out of her way to get things done on her terms, like wanting to join the college band, applying lipstick and stealing cosmetics from the mall were a form of revolting against the chains put on her. In one scene, she is seen dancing in a ceremony which angers her parents as it brings shame to them, she locks her up inside a room and she dances vigorously that being her form of revolt. She lifts her burkha after she steps out of her house showing how she is revealing her actual personality, the one free from bindings when she is without the burkha.

“Forced into labour and the drudgery of working a sewing machine stitching burkhas for the small tailoring unit run by her parents, when she would rather be singing, dancing in college, Rehana’s shoplifting is an act of refusal and protest against capitalism’s demand that workers buy back the products of their own labour at a profit. In her taking of the goods she is able to stake the worker’s original claim and right while bypassing the system’s exploitative profit-making intent. The risky exuberance of her act is also the libidinal unmooring of wants that free market’s consumer culture disbars the worker (with her limited means) from. The burkha allows her nefarious access into malls and high-end shops that have notoriously been known to embarrass the non-buying poor.”(Bhattacharya and Ramdev). Leela’s mother worked as a nude mannequin and she wanted Leela to get married to a settled guy because of her impoverished condition. So, a lot of the consequences in the movie are also derived from class. The narrative erotica and the language used also puts emphasis on the class. So the people around them do live in the urban areas but the mentality and the mindsets are narrow and patriarchal, also the interwoven parts between gender, class and patriarchy.

Parched revolves around three childhood friends in a village

in Rajasthan. Rani, a widow whose husband used to physically abuse her when he was alive. She sees the reflection of her husband in her son Gulab and when he gets married, he treats his wife in a similar fashion. Lajjo is married to an alcoholic husband who blames her for not being able to conceive a child and abuses her both physically and mentally. Bijli, a sex worker and a dancer is Lajjo and Rani’s escape from their troublesome worlds. They are one another’s support system and help each other to survive through life.

They are themselves conditioned in believing that this is how their lives should be and domestic violence is a norm or sex is not to be enjoyed by woman but rather it’s just for man and their emphasizing power and control over women. Rani’s desires are not acknowledged by her husband and she is used as a slave and a thing that exists for re-production and when Rani points out that it may not be her who is at fault for not being able to get pregnant, her husband thinks of it as an accusation on his masculinity and beats her. So the mentality that only women can be responsible when it comes to not being able to re-produce also comes from drawing superiority in being a man and how nothing can ever be a man’s fault but also illiteracy.

The child-bride Janki who is forcefully married and sent off from by her parents, is raped by her drunken teenage husband who visits prostitutes, discusses his wife’s breasts with his friends and brags, “I am fulfilling my husbandly duties even when I don’t like my wife.” So what exactly is a husband’s duty? To beat his wife and raping her? But also, the mocking part where Gulab says how the women should know about how to run a house without a man, which is funny because his house was always run by women. [12-14]

Bijli who is a sex worker is treated badly by the guys who pay her for having sex with her. Does paying someone for sex give a man the authority to ill-treat that woman and hurt her ? Because necessarily paying for sex, doesn’t mean that you buy that person or have the right to hurt them or have any kind of authority or right over any human being. Being a prostitute doesn’t make you any less human or give any right to maltreat any human. Moving and counter-enforcing gender stereotypes, there is a stirring stimulating energetic and erotic energy flowing out of “Parched”, as though the storyteller decides to pull out all stops to let her women characters speak their minds and act out their innermost fantasies, including Rani’s visit to a ‘Mystic Baba’ who impregnates her. The sequence, a highpoint in the hoary history of female eroticism in Hindi cinema, is shot with a spiritual grace.

The film is also rather literal in its definition of “escape”. If good folk vacate every space where they face resistance or exploitation, what is left behind? Does escape necessarily mean a physical exit, and is such an exit even possible for most people? Does the exit actually take you far from the oppressions?

But also at the same time, the film does talk about spaces too. The spaces that these women go around and about in the city also somewhere represents their search for their own identities in those citylights.

Margarita with a Straw, the story that focuses on Laila, a girl with cerebral palsy who never lets disability get into her way

of exploring her sexuality and becoming independent. She has liaisons with a Pakistani girl Khanum, who is blind and gets attracted to her and moves in a live in relationship with her. The lesbian relationship is portrayed in a respectful light where we see it's more about discovering one's own self by discovering their sexualities. The same approach is taken to the general idea of raging hormones in a disabled person (whom much of society would prefer to regard in sexless terms), and to Laila's assumed vulnerability roaming Manhattan. Also how when two disabled people and of same sex end up together, it's not considered a huge 'abnormal' thing as it would have been if one of the people in the relationship would've been without disabilities. She also has sex with a guy, furthering her sexual experimentation and exploring her sexuality. This is a film that centers sexuality and is unapologetic and unashamed about it. Laila is a teenager, and she's interested in sex, and she most certainly has it. While the people around her scoff at her sexuality and express confusion, she is secure in her identity as a sexual person. Disabled sexuality is so stigmatized that disabled people are typically desexualized in media, which makes the depiction of actual sex onscreen, let alone queer sex, revolutionary.

"In societies where there is a premium on beauty, youth and fitness, people with visible disabilities are particularly stigmatised. The more 'different' they look from the 'ideal' as projected through the mass media and films, the more is the discrimination and stigma they encounter. In society's collective illusion and idealisation of the 'perfect' body, a person's visible disability gets the most attention and their other aspects as individuals are ignored." (Sexuality and Disability in Indian Context)

In addition to this stigma, "Disabled women are judged by others to be 'damaged goods'" (Phillips 1990). Associating it with cultural and gendered perspective, 'giving a daughters hand for marriage' is also viewed under the same light.

"Similarly, it is also true that the experience of disability is mediated by variables of social power, including gender and class amongst others. For instance a man with disability might have better chances of getting educated or married than a woman with disability. Similarly, a person with disabilities belonging to an economically wellplaced family might have more access to resources and services than another person with disabilities who is economically weaker. Where one is placed on multiple axes of power will affect what one is able to access in terms of information, opportunities and services." (Sexuality and Disability in Indian Context)

Here, with the intersection of both class and gender in the character of Laila, we know where we can place her in the social power.

"These are very sensitive subjects which require the right depiction. Margarita with a Straw portrayed sexuality in a manner that could be accepted by the middle class. It is important for cinema to address sex and women. It is important to show that women have control over their bodies and that sex isn't just for children, a barter or something you don't have a say in. It is surprising how regressed we are in this day and age," says Shonali Bose, director of Margarita with A Straw.

According to a source Kalki, who plays Laila in the movie, stated: "I'm playing a lesbian, but the film is not so much about being 'a lesbian'. It's about a girl with cerebral palsy, who explores her sexuality and comes to terms with it. She falls in love easily and there's awkwardness about her since she doesn't know what sex is and how to interact with the one she admires. It's hard enough for any of us to come to terms with sexuality, and when one is disabled, there's an extra barrier of low self-esteem. The film explores whether Laila's bisexual, gay or heterosexual. The film also deals with nudity, but it has been shot aesthetically."

The intersections between class, gender and the subverted patriarchy and how Laila makes the choices for herself can all be seen in this movie.

Conclusion

These films address the issues that were presented but not 'talked about' in length in the Indian Cinema. These films actually brought the 'veiled' issues in the public scrutiny. Even when they were surrounded by controversies at least they were brought in the public eye and talked about and importantly in a positive way. The portrayal of the women basically being the representation of the unrepresented, also from the point of view of talking about 'desire' and 'female sexuality' along with the layers overshadowing it like class, patriarchy and gender. The 'untalked' gets a voice from the women, by the women. So the characters revolt to fulfill their desires, dreams and freedom; things which hetero-patriarchy tries to sabotage and treat as non-existent and how the nuancing patriarchy or the hetero-patriarchy couldn't hold these women characters. The open-ends of all the movies give the space to the audience to interpret according to them but also simultaneously giving that space to the characters which they took a stand for all along in the movies. The depth with which these films not only bring the concerned issues into focus but also put perspective and talk in detail about them is something that wasn't done till given time.

Bollywood, with time has evolved. When on one hand, Bollywood is said to applaud films like Kahaani or English Vinglish, which somewhere are representations of strong women characters; films which talked about female sexuality still even in 2017 face consequences before release. But the researcher would also like to point out what the purpose of the films touching these issues can be. Radhika Apte, who recently acted in Parched says, "As a society, we have always alienated the subject and it's almost considered as taboo. Films like these start the dialogue, even if it works on 10 people out of the rest, it's a great change."

And the researcher does second what Tannishtha Chatterjee, who acted in Parched, is saying about how these films are an expression of how women in India are changing and expressing themselves. "There is a greater participation by women in making these films, and also, the spending power of women as audiences has increased — it is not just family-oriented films which make it at the box office. As artistes, we have to push the existing boundaries and think beyond the norm. If enough stories are told, they can have an impact."

Although, these factors are pushing the existing boundaries and

going beyond the norms, are these actually successful in catering to the people whose issues are addressed in these films? Is the

breaking of the norms in terms of representation enough? Or isn't there a need to have a pre-reading to understand the issues addressed?

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