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The Reflection of Empowered Womanhood in Bollywood Movie ‘Parched’

Abstract: In the era of post-colonialism, margins have started knocking back the centre and Indian mainstream cinema is no exception to this. From the inception of Indian Cinema, it sidelined marginal elements- especially women- but with the passage of time, it is adopting the ‘Road Not Taken’ yet. All over the world, the issue of Women Empowerment is in discussion. Feminist writers have been upheld this issue and have given way through various platforms. Gayatri Spivak and Meenakshi Thapan, talk about women empowerment in detail in their works.

Empowerment is reflected through women assertion. Rebel, resistance, skills of negotiating and crisis management and abusive use of language are their tools of assertion. Empowerment is seen when protagonists from film – ‘Parched’ openly express their dreams and desires and seek freedom from social, cultural, economical and bodily clutches. Their empowerment is reflected through their rebel against society’s sexual norms. These empowered women represent the image of new woman who is no longer submissive but assertive and thus tries to form new equations of equality

Key Words: Indian mainstream cinema, Women Empowerment, assertion, rebel, equality.

In the era of post-colonialism, margins have started knocking back at the centre and Indian mainstream cinema is no exception to this. From the inception of Indian Cinema, it sidelined marginal elements- especially women- but with the passage of Time, it is adopting the 'Road Not Taken' yet. All over the world, the issue of Women Empowerment is in discussion. Feminist writers have upheld this issue and have given way through various platforms. Gayatri Spivak and Meenakshi Thapan, talk about women empowerment in detail in their works. Empowerment is seen through women assertion. Spivak in her work "Can the Subaltern Speak?" upheld the subject of the subaltern women. Thapan (2009) calculates women assertion in terms of voice, will and agency and Spivak in her book, *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, defines agency as institutionally validated action.

There are various definitions of women empowerment. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines empowerment as the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you. Anita Vaidyanathan (2013) defines empowerment as "women's ability to negotiate strategies, manipulate and rebel against events, situations". For Bina Agarwal, (2008) empowerment is a process whereby individuals through individual or collective acts of resistance and rebellion bring a change in existing power relations. Neera Tandon (2008) also exhibits her view of empowerment. For Tandon, a woman who is aware of her identity and dignity and who fights against oppression and subjugation is an empowered woman. Resistances, rebellion, negation, retaliation, conflict management are the modes through which women assert their empowerment

Director Leena Yadav's movie 'Parched' presents image of empowered womanhood. The movie has got 18 international awards. The film narrates the story of three woman characters that rebel against masochism and patriarchy on their own and finally get succeeded in achieving what they want to do. The three protagonists Bijali, Lajjo and Rani live in a village

of Rajasthan. Bijali is dancer and prostitute. Lajjo, a house-wife, accused of being barren (banjh). Rani is a widow who fights single-handily with society.

Lajjo is a fitting example of empowered womanhood and it is mirrored through her bold and die-hard attitude. She is a bread-winner. She stitches clothes but is beaten by her husband Manoj for her infertility. Her empowerment comes to notice when she courageously exposes her husband's impotence before Panchayat. Lajjo demands self respect and warns patriarchy for it. She asserts thus, 'A Women has value even without a child. We were not born just to bear children'. Again her empowerment gets reflected through her sewing skill. Lajjo is skilled worker and is awarded best worker title by handcraft committee. At last when Lajjo lost sensibility she displays courage and asserts back finally to her husband Manoj, thus, "From now on I will let my heart decide" and enjoys sex with a holy man (Adil Hussain) and got pregnant. Lajjo has objection against patriarchy which looks down female gender. Being aware of self gender, she subverts male gender in this way, 'why is a woman getting fucked in every fuss? Motherfucker! Sisterfucker! Why not sonfucker! Unclefucker! Fatherfucker! Brotherfucker!

Rani, is widow of 32 years, like Lajjo, a bread-winner of her family. Her negotiation skills in match making for her son are proof of her empowerment. She performs responsibility of her son Gulab and a bedridden mother-in-law. She fights against male-chauvinist everywhere. Her empowerment reflects when she asserts her self-dignity, warning her own son when he tries to beat his wife Janaki (Leher Khan). She warns him, thus, 'she is my daughter, if anything happens to her, I'll kill you'. Her representative advice to her son (patriarchy) is enough in this regard when she says "Don't hurry to be a man. Learn to be human first"

Bijali is an erotic dancer and sex worker in a local entertainment company. Not bound to marriage institution, she is a free bird. Like Lajjo and Rani, she is bread-winner

though not in society's set norms. Bijali's empowerment is mirrored when she advises Rani thus, 'forget, what others say, follow your heart Rani.' Again her empowerment gets reflected in her challenge to masculinity. She speaks freely what she felt and questions to masochism. During conversation among them, Bijali challenges masculinity thus, "A woman has value, even without a child. Are we born just to bear children? Man can be infertile. Let us see who is barren, Him or you". She has that spark to lighten Rani and Lajjo, who consequently defies social norms and open their hearts on matters of love, lust, sex, dreams and desires. During conversation with Lajjo, Rani expresses Bijali's opinion on sex. Rani says, "Only one thing makes woman a glow. No milk soap or cream, in Bijali's words its called sex."

Apart from these protagonists, empowerment of Naobi is also remarkable. Naobi is Kishan's wife, educated, who speaks fluent English. She is from Manipur and teaches children of nearby village. Her empowerment is seen in her ability of negotiation. She negotiates a new contract of handicraft for village women. She retaliates back strongly, when young boys tries to molest her. She asserts in this way, 'I'm not some alien from outer space' Champa, the minor character, also display her empowerment when she rebels against society. She is angry Indian woman who express her anger thus, "Their (society) support can go to hell".

Empowerment is seen when three protagonists openly speak about sex, a taboo subject. They express their appetite for love, sex and companions. Their empowerment is reflected through their rebel against society's sexual norms and violation of "socially approved or normative behavior..." (XV). Rani expresses her sexual desire to her imaginary lover Shahrukh Khan. Being a widow for 15 years, she has those powerful sexual instincts that disclose to her imaginary lover. She says, "Tell me Shahrukh Khan where and when you want to meet?" Hungry for genuine love from their husbands, failing them they seek alternative way

to solace. This is true with Lajjo's case. When devoid of her drunkard husband Manoj, she seeks love (bodily) in holy man.

Empowerment is also expressed through their use of language. Their articulation of emotion gets reflection through abusive language. These protagonists make free-play of words like, motherfucker, witch, bitch, dirty, whore, sisterfucker, fatherfucker, brotherfucker, MC, BC. In this regard Anita Vaidyanthan's comment is appropriate. She comments, thus, 'They celebrate their identity . . . through the use of abusive language' (P. 100-101). At the end of the movie all three protagonists celebrate collective empowerment thus, in Lajjo's words, 'Today we cleanse our lives. Today we leave darkness behind'

Of all the themes that 'Parched' dealt with, Lesbianism or ownership of female body is perhaps the most important one. Still today, Indian society, especially, patriarchy is not mature enough to deal with subject of Lesbianism. Nevertheless the movie touches the issue and tries to underline women's right on her body and sex. Patriarchy always considers female body as its right; however that notion is uprooted here in the film when three protagonists took naked bath in river on moonlit night and thus their incessant desire gets fulfilled. Lajjo and Rani assert their right on their bodies in a carnal desires scene between them where Rani describes Lajjo's body thus, "your mouth is like luscious berries. I want to suck juice from them. Accused of infertile womb, booze has drowned all the love inside you".

The title of the film suggests women's' hunger for freedom in terms of social, cultural, economical and bodily. They are thirsting for more or Their 'Dil Mange More'. They are independent, self supportive and represent the image of new woman who is no longer submissive but assertive.

Conclusion- These empowered women represent the image of new woman who is no longer submissive but assertive and thus tries to form new equations of equality. They are seekers of their dreams in their ways and are hungry of freedom from social, cultural, economical and

bodily clutches. They listen to their “inner voice” and bring forth the socially taboo subject of sex and assert themselves covertly or overtly. Their background of village is no more hindrance to their empowerment. The DNA of rebel is strongly present among these village protagonists. Rebel, resistance, skills of negotiating and crisis management and abusive use of language are their tools of assertion. They advise patriarchy, thus, in Rani’s words, “don’t hurry to be a man. Learn to be human first”.

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