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### Analysing the short film “Juice” as a discourse of resistance

#### Abstract

Representation and identity are issues of great importance as they shape how society perceives and treats the subject who is represented. Spaces also contribute to and are influenced by the dominant ideology. The house is often conceived of as a safe space, away from the unequal and unfair social world. However, gender discrimination through segregation of both roles and spaces exists in these spaces and is naturalized through the instruments of tradition and patriarchy. In recent times, short films have emerged as an influential and accessible medium of representation. This paper aims to examine how resistance to dominant ideology is articulated within domestic spaces through the analysis of the short film “Juice”. This study will focus on choice and agency in domestic spaces to understand ideological resistance.

Keywords: domestic spaces, gender, ideological resistance, patriarchy, short films.

## Introduction

### Youtube-Space for Ideological Resistance

YouTube as a social media site has been largely accessible for viewers across various social categories owing to the large scale expansion of digitality in the last decade. However, Paul noted that “those who access YouTube in India are predominantly the urban middle-and upper-class population” (125). While acknowledging the class barriers to accessibility and to digitality, YouTube still remains relevant - its “user-friendly interface allows for free sharing of video content and enables the audience to interact with the content through an accompanying message board” (125). YouTube, therefore, has the potential to work as a democratic platform

by virtue of opening access to content as well as space for participation to most public who are connected through internet, online or offline (given Youtube videos can be shared via offline with people who do not have internet access.)

One important dimension for the opening up of the spaces such as Youtube has been to also provide a space for independent filmmakers and content creators to upload content for sharing. Apart from offering a platform for entertainment, creative expression and knowledge sharing, Youtube also has also played a key role in allowing creators to bring problems and conflicts in society to the attention of its viewers in different formats. Two examples can be cited here to substantiate how YouTube has become a space of dissent and resistance through the creation of content and participation of YouTubers and other audience members in engaging with the content uploaded on YouTube (Sahoo & Das, 2018). Stand-Up comedy and short films, apart from public debates occupy a significant space in the content creation. While for Stand-Up, humor, as satire or parody intervenes

public debates and problematizes the status quo, whether justified by class, gender and caste, albeit the last one being hardly touched upon by many major stand-up comedians (Sahoo & Das, 2018). Through these efforts, YouTube becomes a space that allows for the boundaries of the dominant ideology to be addressed and resisted. The other is the area of short films.

### Short films

Short films help in ideological resistance as well. Their 'guerrilla warfare' (Fiske, 2017) by the content producers is against the normatives in the society. While Stand-up comedy resists the dominant ideology by presenting the absurdity of social practices, short films through their thematic focus and narrativising of social norms and the characters' resistance through them resist ideologies. Thus, short films create a space where the issues are narrativised, provided a armour of 'fiction' and presented as an everyday universe.

### Popular Culture, Ideology, Resistance

In defining the scope and functions of Popular Culture, Fiske argues that "the resources—television, records, clothes, video games, language—carry the interests of the

economically and ideologically dominant; they have lines of force within them that are hegemonic and that work in favor of the status quo." If this understanding is prevalent, then YouTube short stories, including all other content producers should be guilty of creating visual discourses of majoritarian normative perspectives.

In the last few years, there has been a significant shift in conceptualising what short stories on YouTube could function as. Short films, according to Paul Lacey focus on "stories that deal with what characters feel rather than what characters do" (52). This microscopic

focus imbibes short films with an ability to impact viewers closely and to draw their attention to social issues. Deb Hoskins affirms the power of short films as tools to raise awareness due to their immediacy, strong affect and alternative perspective that contribute to ideological resistance (16). YouTube, as well as other social sites such as Vimeo and Instagram to name a few host an ever growing number of short films which focus on contemporary issues and problems. The focus of some of these short films is to bring to light issues of people which are not represented by the mainstream. This allows for a formulation of YouTube as a space to be a space for “guerilla warfare” (Fiske, 2017) wherein it asserts the following

“culture making (and culture is always in process, never achieved) is a social process: all meanings of self, of social relations, all the discourses and texts that play such important cultural roles can circulate only in relationship to the social system...Any social system needs a cultural system of meanings that serves either to hold it in place or destabilize it, to make it more or less amenable to change. Culture (and its meanings and pleasures) is a constant succession of social practices; it is therefore inherently political, it is centrally involved in the *distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power.*” (our emphasis, 1-2)

Dixit (2019) following Chakrabarty asserts that “the history of Indian cinema presents a woeful picture of discrimination and marginalization of women. Whether it is a film of the 50s or of the 90s there has been little difference in the image of the celluloid woman.” (163) Additionally, the predominantly male filmmakers stress upon the fact that they are “catering to what the audiences are accustomed to seeing.” (Chakrabarty 164)” and following Nair argues that “films primarily focus on men’s conflicts, dreams, aspirations, tragedies, revenge, desires and heroism.”

It is this conflict that is prevalent in the world of Youtube short stories that allows both narratives of conformance and resistance to emerge. Often, such stories have a voice that is otherwise not considered as representable in the mainstream media. This creates a space for counter or alternative narratives that allow the audience to critically assess the inherent ideologies of our everyday lives. While there are several short films that could speak about an issue highlighted above, this paper analyses a short film, Juice to substantiate the argument.

This paper presents an analysis of Juice, a short film that aimed to resist the gendered narratives of agency and choice within domestic spaces, a space, often eulogized and its evils hid under the garb of 'pride and vanity' of honour. The patriarchal structure of the domestic space, the in-built dominance adopts three policies "conformance, evasion and resistance".

#### Juice - A Case Study

The Short Film "Juice" (2017) directed by Neeraj Ghaywan presents a scenario that might appear quite mundane to Indian middle class families, recreating onscreen the various actions and dialogues that belong perfectly in a middle class gathering as well as the division of space according to gender and age. The men fill the living room with laughter and 'political' debates, the women in the kitchen focus on ensuring that everyone is fed and the children are entertained. As the film progresses, social issues such as pregnancy, child rearing, women in the workplace and discrimination on the basis of gender and class come into play.

The film moves with a narrative form that has several embedded narratives within it. The film is foregrounded with a context wherein the men of the house occupy a relaxing centrestage, literally by the use of camera wherein the sofas occupy the centre and metaphorically, wherein their voices are loud and foregrounded. They adopt the stereotypical patriarchal perspectives of women's incapability in politics and patronizing women

employees in their own professional workspace.

In one of the opening scenes, one male member asserts,

Excerpt 1

Narrator: this business about she was not likeable, she was not likeable. There's this thing you say about tough women who don't confirm to kind of feminine stereotype. Hillary Clinton did not conform. So she was... And that's part of the reason.

(Loud male laughter)

In a recent study by Hassan (2019), she asserts the following

“Studies have also shown that men are respected more than women (Biernat & Kobrynowics, 1997; Foschi, 2000). Men are routinely preferred over women for jobs of high responsibility have been supported by research (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Same-sex bias was also found to be common. Male raters were found to give higher appraisals of men's performance on the job than their counterparts (Bowen, Swim, & Jacobs, 2000). A successful woman holding a male-dominated position experiences amplified discrimination and resistance.”

This study formulated a review of the existing biases against women in the hiring process in the employment situations. This observation works well to discuss how women, whether feminine or not, applying for a male-dominated job or not is perceived by immediate colleagues and discriminated against. Women in politics is an example of reverting the status-quo wherein the woman asserts or articulates, or more importantly is visibly seen as engaging with the public to take an idea or vision forward, ranging from directing smaller areas to even nations. This observation by the narrator, as an opening remark also alludes to the feminist movements wherein suffrage became pivotal in situating women's agency and rights in the political system beyond homes and how that is seen as a threat to the

patriarchal understanding of political participation.

This section of the narrative seems to conform to the patriarchal attitudes and focuses on the same. The next excerpt substantiates another crucial element.

Excerpt 2

Mr Singh: I'd explained madam everything in person, like a school kid. All good. When I finished, she asks me to write everything in an email."

Guest: So, what's wrong with that? Mr

Singh : Wrong? I was mad as hell!

Guest two: Tell us, Mr Singh, what annoyed you more? The email or the female?

(The men laugh)

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Guest one: Listen Mr. Khan, What's annoying is her drama over minor details.

Guest one: Although I...

Guest one: Never really...

Guest one: expressed my disagreement openly.

*Manju leaves.*

Guest one: But I always knew that madam's appointment was a bad decision.

Continuing with the observation, Hassan (2019) makes in her article, that in situations, whereas a man can be viewed as "confident and assertive, a woman with a similar approach is most likely to be viewed as conceited and bossy (Trinh, 2015)." In professional spaces, which are supposedly based on objective and capability based appraisals, genders stereotyping

Discriminates between applauding the professionalism of a woman and a man. Similarly here, the woman employee being a manager, occupying a distinctly higher or equal post as the narrator in the above post, is being subjected to crass laughter. The joke trivialises her existence as a fellow employer to a rhyming trope; clearly her expectation of a documentation of the process, a marker which would otherwise be lauded for systematicity (asking for details) and professionalism is brought forth as a negative capability. This instance too substantiates the patriarchy prevalent in the society and foregrounds the prejudiced gendered discrimination prevalent in the employment processes wherein “If women expressed agent behaviour (to be perceived as qualified for a leadership position), their competence ratings were equal to those of agentic men. But they suffered from the backlash effect in terms of social repercussions”.

### Excerpt 3

Mrs Shukla: How are you Mrs Singh?

Manju: I am good. Good you came. I almost thought you won't.

Mr Shukla: She had to come. Not like she's got a lot of work at home. At least here she can be an extra hand in the kitchen.

(Mrs Shukla smiles.)

Mr Shukla: Also, she's learnt new recipes. Make her cook. (Mrs Shukla touches her abdomen.)

Mr Shukla: Come on, get started!

In feminist studies, the articulation of women's labour in the household has been a matter of concern. However, more importantly, the representation of women as conforming to the standards of women as carriers of domesticities has been an issue of contention. While studies reveal a shift from shifting gender roles in understanding women and men's roles at home, this excerpt reminds us of the failed cultural expectations that retain gendered distinctions. Mrs Shukla, as will be evident later works and is being asked by her husband to quit because of her pregnancy and here, her husband measures her worth on the basis of her time engaged in housework, specifically, cooking. What is alarming is he is appraising the woman's capability in a public space and on the basis of a parameter that reeks of prejudiced stereotype.

#### Articulation of Resistance

Two strong resistances are articulated in the film which deserve attention. In line with Fiske, wherein he argues popular culture allows ideologies to be resisted or evaded, the paper will demonstrate how through Manju, the protagonists' few actions, the film resists the gendered geography of the home and thereby challenge the normative. The second resistance is specifically the resistance to the constructions of the normalised sociality of gendered geographies. Domosh has looked at the importance of looking at architectural spaces, the geographies and the gendered construction of our household and domestic spaces, everyday spaces, including kitchen whereby our dwellings are enmeshed with gender narratives. Spain has also argued how "gendered spaces themselves shape, and are shaped by, daily activities. Once in place, they often become taken for granted, unexamined, and seemingly immutable. What is becomes what ought to be, which contributes to the maintenance of prevailing status differences". Llewellyn asserts that

"for Spain, the key to understanding women's relationship to the city, or indeed

the home, is to acknowledge that ‘it is not just that the spatial is socially constructed; the social is spatially constructed too.’ This construction means that ‘gendered realities’ are produced, predicated around everyday life: gendered spaces themselves shape, and are shaped by, daily activities. Once in place, they often become taken for granted, unexamined, and seemingly immutable. What is becomes what ought to be, which contributes to the maintenance of prevailing status differences” (44).

#### Articulation of Resistance - Final Scene Revisited

Presented below is an excerpt from the final scenes.

Women: Let’s lay out the plates for the men before they cause a ruckus

(Manju is trying to get the chicken unstuck from the pan)

Mr Singh: Manju, what is taking so long?

(Manju stops working. Watches the rest of the women.)

(She opens the refrigerator and takes out the bottle of juice, pours it in a glass and leaves the kitchen)

(The rest of the women are confused but follow her until the hallway and look at her opening the door to the hall)

(Manju waits at the door for a brief moment)

Men: Hilary got a punch in the face. Trump trumped the presidential race. (

Men laugh)

(Manju drags a chair next and positions it next to the cooler. She takes a seat.) (The men stop laughing and look down)

(The rest of the women observe from the door) (The men are unable to look at Manju)

(Manju sips her juice and relaxes) (She

looks at her husband.)

(Mr Singh looks down.)

(Manju looks directly into the camera and takes a sip of her juice) (The screen fades to black)

Throughout the narrative, there has been an undercurrent of a binary: men as engaging in “intellectual talk” and women engaging in “domestic unpaid labour”. Men located in drawing rooms, women in kitchen. Men enjoying the privileges of a fan and the comfort of leisure by sitting on sofa. Men being served food wherein they continue drinking and women serving them food. It is to be noted that the wives of all the male members were in the kitchen but there was

variations in the labour. Some women continued to work, while others gossiped, Others engaged with debates about motherhood as a choice or definite requirement of feminine existence. There were discourse within kitchen regarding education as being a pivotal aspect of women “speaking too much” or being “too informed”. In the midst of all of this, there was a silent thunderstorm brewing, a sweltering rage. Manju, was working for most of the times and was characterised as a character who doesn't fall prey to discriminatory behaviours (a scene where different treatment was meted out to the help, she doesn't stop but with her gaze interacts with the victim and shows her solidarity).

Manju had called her husband quite a few times to fix the fan that she with effort brought down from the loft in her kitchen, The husband sometimes ignored or said he would come and help without moving from his chair. However, that didn't stop him from ordering food from his wife, reinstating a prejudiced patriarchal image of domestic labour.

It is important to note Manju's resistance here: she marks out a geography, clearly while dragging her chair, making a sound, that cuts across all other sounds and foregrounds the resistance materially. When Manju drags a chair next and positions it next

to the cooler. And sits down, she responds, materially and gesturally to the absence of “leisure” and the privileges for women in domestic spaces. This response is loud, not by volume, but by its ‘audacity’ to question the centrality of power, held phallogocentrically. The men stop laughing and look down. Note that this resistance is not without implications and she doesn't gain instant recognition and support, wherein the women do not join but observe from the door of the kitchen. The challenge to the phallus of the geography and the conception of domestic work makes the “centre”, the men, uncomfortable and they are unable to look at Manju. She doesn't wage a war with violence. She asserts her rights: intrudes the centre, sits there, and ‘plays’. She sips her juice and relaxes with a gaze sharply pointed at her husband, which reek of questions, challenges, resistance, and a letting go of the angst at the differential treatment. When she looks at Mr Singh her husband, he looks down. Manju doesn't stop. She uses the camera to break the fourth wall to assert the arrival of the ‘female’ with her articulation of breaking the women appear for male privileges, looking directly into the camera and taking a sip of her juice, allowing the audience to reflect on the resistance, subtly but assertively.

## Conclusion

The film delivers a powerful picture of ideological resistance through the female protagonist, Manju when she occupies the centre of the living room with the men, instead of remaining in the kitchen. This act of ‘rebellion’ could be seen as a way popular culture significations can have a significant implication for the changes in the society. The public discourse could benefit from engaging with such alternative voices in the social media discourses. These alternative voices and visuals can also be instrumental by functioning as catalysts, facilitating awareness and educating the masses. Additionally, such voices may also serve to empower the unrepresented.

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