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## **GENDER AND NATION: TRADITION AND TRANSITION**

Mass media is a major site through which the images of 'Femininity' is constructed, marketed and perpetuated in India. The world's largest film industry based in Bombay, known as Bollywood (which is the answer to Hollywood) is owned by big business men who are highly patriarchal in their mindset. Since he who pays, calls the tune, it is not surprising that the patriarchal values of the producers get reflected in the movies sponsored by them. These constructed images of femininity as docile, self effacing, sacrificing and chaste get institutionalized through the most powerful of mass media, namely the movies. Nevertheless, of late, these traditional representations of Indian women have been fiercely challenged by both men and women producers and directors. In order to highlight the transition I discuss 4 Indian movies, two of them made by two women of the Indian Diaspora in North America.

Keywords: contemporary Indian film, representations of women

My paper is about the relation between 'gender' and 'nation' and the changing conceptualization of 'gender' as depicted through Indian movies. After stating the definitions of a few key terms, I give a brief account of the movies produced in India, especially in Bombay, called Bollywood movies. The typical ingredients of a Bollywood movie and how gender gets delineated in these movies are described. Of late certain changes are visible in gender relations as reflected in these movies. I discuss two movies to show how these changes are captured in them. I then argue that power is masculine and to gain recognition in the male world of power, to its inner circles, women become masculinized. I conclude with the argument that there are alternative ways of dealing with power and that we need more women as producers, directors and scriptwriters to unveil those alternative realities.

Let me start with definitions of a few terms. The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines 'nation' as "a *community* of people composed of one or more nationalities and possessing a more or less defined territory

and government". "Government" is defined as "the complex of political institutions, laws, and customs through which the function of governing is carried out". "Governing" means "to exercise continuous sovereign authority over, especially to *control* and *direct* the making and administration of policy". The dictionary defines 'community' as "a body of persons or nations having a *common* history or *common* social, economic and political interests". (All italics here are mine)

"A body of persons having a common history" – but history as embodied in books has always been partisan and prejudicial, always narrating 'his' story alone and almost never 'her' story as well. The use of the generic term 'person' is a silencing technique employed by phallogocentricists to erase the experiences of women. It is an opiate administered to anaesthetize our cerebral faculties. "A body of persons or nations having a common social, economic and political interests" – if we subject this to scrutiny, the social, economic or political project of a nation, we discover patriarchal agendas hidden neatly under the pseudogeneric term 'people' – a term that 'other'ises, excludes or denies the reality of women.

An aggregate of people becomes a community only when there are common interests that cement them together. Devoid of common interests, people will not agglutinate into a community. They will remain merely a multiplicity of people each with his own or her own interests, those of the powerful finding express manifestation while those of the disenfranchised remaining suppressed and mute. So the salient characteristic that metamorphoses a disparate group of people into a 'community', which in turn qualifies them to be called a 'nation', is the "common interest" that glue them together.

For an interest to be 'common' it has to be shared by all people concerned. Unfortunately the interests that masquerade as 'common' are in reality the interests of only one sex, namely that of the male embodied persons. When a lie is repeated uncontested a thousand times, it acquires the potency of truth. The so called 'common' interests have been verbalized not a thousand times but billions of times that the female of the species too accepts them as 'common' without calling those interests to question.

If we dissect the superstructure of society, be it law, religion, custom, ideology, the inappropriateness of the term 'common' will become evident. In common parlance 'male' has become synonymous with 'common' and when male speakers are asked why they had used generic terms like 'people' or 'common interests' instead of using specific terms like 'male', they invariably reply that 'male' embraces 'female'. Therefore the 'male', by constant usage that has gone without interrogation for centuries, has acquired the status of the reference point, the yardstick against which everything else is measured. Thus, as Catherine MacKinnon says,

the state is male in the feminist sense. The law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women. The liberal state coercively and authoritatively constitutes the social order in the interest of men as a gender, through its legitimizing norms, relation to society, and substantive policies (MacKinnon 1983:644).

Through her brilliant analysis she shows how the law of rape is male defined and how the crime of rape centers on penetration and not from the perspective of the loss and violence suffered by the victim, the female.

Just as tricksters have the capacity to conjure up optical illusion, so do patriarchal men have the ability to create an illusion that all that is male applies also to the female; it is universal. These are not just errors or biases for as Shelley E. Taylor and Jonathan D. Brown say, "Error and bias imply short-term mistakes and distortions respectively, that might be caused by careless oversight or other temporary negligences." It is more "pervasive, enduring, and systematic" (Taylor & Brown 1988:193-210). Illusion in contrast implies a more general, enduring pattern of error, bias, or both that assumes a particular direction or shape.

Citing Stein's definition, the authors continue that illusion is defined, as "a perception that represents what is perceived in a way different from the way it is in reality. An illusion is a false mental image or conception which may be a misrepresentation of a real appearance or may be something imagined" (Stein, J. (Ed.) (unabridged ed) New York: Random House) 1982. *The Random House Dictionary of the English language*.

This process of creating an illusion of an imagined universality or a false mental image of commonality of interest is in reality a process of drawing boundaries that include certain interests and exclude certain other equally legitimate interests. These boundaries while validating certain kinds of experiences delegitimize certain "others". Thus male interests get included as the 'common' interest of the nation while female interests get totally erased. What Helma Lutz, Ann Phoenix and Nira Yuval-Davis said of nationalism and racism is equally true of patriarchy, that "other"ises women.

Whenever a delineation of boundaries takes place – as is the case with every ethnic and national collectivity – processes of exclusion and inclusion are in operation. These can take place with varying degrees of intensity and with a variety of cultural, religious and state mechanisms. But exclusions of 'the Other' can become an inherent part of national ethnicities and an obsessive preoccupation of the national culture and of the national political project (Lutz, Phoenix & Yuval-Davis 1995:4).

Paradoxically enough, thus while men are the representatives and spokesmen of the nation, reflecting the 'common' interests of the 'people', women are the symbols of the nation. Thus symbolically certain nations are equated with "Mother" (like Mother India, Mother Russia, Mother Ireland). This powerless, symbolic status is only a recompense paid to women in lieu of the de facto representation that has been denied to

women. In reality, the 'common' history, 'common' social, economic and political interests that get articulated in popular discourses are that of only the male sex. Therefore by logical extension the various genres of hegemonic artistic expressions of the 'community' will also reflect the homogenizing experiences, realities, hopes and aspirations of only one sex, *the sex*, namely the male sex.

Now coming to 'Gender', it may be defined as the social construction of masculinity and femininity within a framework of power relation. It is the conceptualization of the masculine and feminine in a dichotomous, hierarchical way. Since hierarchy is central to the presently existing cultural construct of gender relation between men and women, 'nation' which is an agglomeration of persons would also reflect this hierarchy. For any hierarchy to exist, there has to be subordination of one or more groups; not elimination of groups, for groups have to exist to exercise subordination over.

R.W. Connell refers to the gaining of ascendancy by masculinity as the "hegemonic masculinity".

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, 'hegemony' means (as in Gramsci's analyses of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes (Connell 1987:184).

Connell goes on to argue that hegemony is accomplished primarily by

preventing alternatives gaining cultural definitions and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness (Connell 1987:186).

For Connell, the complementary concept to "hegemonic masculinity" is "emphasized femininity" which is performed to men and which is reflected in 'womanly virtues' like compliance, nurturance, empathy etc. Connell rightly points out that although the content of "emphasized femininity" is private, it is promoted publicly – by the images that are circulated through print and electronic media.

What is femininity? Mary Daly says,

Femininity is a man-made construct, having essentially nothing to do with femaleness... Femininity is quintessentially a male attribute" (Daly 1978:68, 69).

Femininity is the sum total of the culturally cultivated responses to situations by female embodied persons. Man makes woman. To put it another way, it is man, who designs, controls, and perpetuates notions of femininity.

What is psychologically terrifying is the power with which men impose these constructed images of femininity to be seen and experienced

as authentic women's experience. bell hooks cites Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora":

It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that "knowledge" not only as a matter of imposed will and domination but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm (hooks 1992:3).

This kind of colonization of women's mind especially through images and representation both oral and visual is one of the first steps in the subjugation and oppression of women.

Let us examine how these constructed images of masculinity and femininity are reflected in Indian movies, especially those produced in Bombay. How does femininity get depicted in the mainstream Indian movies produced in India, popularly called Bollywood movies? Bollywood is larger than Hollywood in terms of production. Annually it produces on an average a thousand movies. It produces feature films in 20 regional languages of India and sells four times more tickets than Hollywood in the United States. Bollywood movies are the big budget movies produced with the explicit object of entertaining people while filling the coffers of the producers. So the typical movie has some action, some comedy, few love songs and dance sequences.

The early Bollywood movies cast women in gender stereotypes – she is docile, submissive, self-effacing, unquestioningly obedient, patient, all enduring. She is the epitome of sacrifice. Even in the face of excruciating mental torture and physical abuse by her husband and in-laws, she will not complain. Her silent suffering is romanticized. Her inner voice of protest does not find articulation; it becomes still born in the womb of her heart. Although the authentic woman in her might want to scream and rebel against the injustice meted out to her, the man-made fake woman in her, like the Super Ego on Id suppresses the rebellion. Like Ibsen's heroine Nora in the "Doll's House", she is not able to slam the door shut and walk out of the suffocating house because she is mentally programmed into subservience by a patriarchal culture. In the early movies we rarely come across any fierce critical interrogation of patriarchy that oppresses women. The only exceptions were a few regional movies produced in progressive states like West Bengal, Kerala etc.

What gradually metamorphosed this scenario was a combination of factors like the establishment of the "Film and Television Institute" in Pune near Bombay, the arrival of stalwarts like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Ramu Karyatt etc, the advent of television serials which were comparatively less costly in production and distribution, the celebration of the International Decade of the Women along with the publication of the Report on the Status of Women in India.

In the eighties we start seeing movies that contest the traditional conceptualization of femininity. Women start interrogating the hitherto

passive roles assigned to them in families and in society. I try to illustrate my point with clippings from two movies – the first movie is called **Bawandar** which when translated means "sandstorm" and the second movie is titled **Godmother**, both of which show transgressive images of women.

Through the first movie, **Bawandar**, I try to show the ways in which gender and nation interact together in ways that transgress the traditional roles assigned to femininity. Nation is represented through the state apparatuses of the police, politician and judiciary. Patriarchy in India, as elsewhere, is very wary of feminism. Any serious debate on feminist issues is anathema to patriarchal power structures, for a heightened salience of feminism in the public sphere would be divisive, would destabilize the social fabric and would lead to greater politicization of women which is a suspect under patriarchal scrutiny.

'Bawandar' or 'Sandstorm' is a movie based on the real story of a woman who belongs to the potter caste which is regarded a very low caste in the caste hierarchy in India. The woman's husband is badly beaten up by a gang of upper caste (*Gujjar*) men and in front of her husband's eyes, she is gang raped by five of them (both old and young men). The woman, named Savri Devi, is gang raped because she organized women against evil practices like child marriage and sexual harassment. The first clipping shows her encounter with the police when she goes to the police station with her husband to report her rape.

When Savri Devi's husband tells the police officer that his wife was gang raped, the officer asks him,

"Which caste do you belong to?"

"Potter's caste."

"You bloody fool! Why do you want to invite trouble with the *Gujjars*? Don't you want any one of your people to be alive in the village?"

"What's this Sir? My wife has lost her honour."

"Is your wife any innocent teenaged girl? Look, now it's of no use to stir the hornet's nest. Let bygones be bygones. Forget everything. You go away."

But Savri Devi insists,

"I want... I want to lodge a complaint."

The police officer asks,

"Are you crazy? Be within your limits."

He advises,

"Look, its better for you to compromise. If you ask for, I'll get some money also as a compensation."

Savri Devi says,

"Who wants a compromise? You register my complaint."

The police officer loses his temper and shouts, striking his baton on his desk,

"What's that, you are going on insisting registering the complaint! Complaint can't be registered just like that. First go and get a medical report. Do you have it with you? This is a case of rape. First get the medical report."

He pushes the couple with his baton out of his room. As they leave the room, the officer says aloud,

"Even ants have developed wings. Look at that dare of that bitch!"

The second clipping is a scene from the far away women's police station closer to the town, where Savri Devi halts for a night to meet the magistrate the next morning to get an order from him to get the doctor to examine her. The women police officers are playing a game of cards at night in the police station. The gang rape of Savri Devi becomes the topic of discussion in her presence, while they play the game of cards. One of the women police officers asks the other,

"What is the case?"

"376"

"So, she has lost her honour!" (Laughter)

"Poor girl."

"Are you feeling cold? Hey lazy bone! Give her a rug."

"Which caste does she belong to?"

"Potter's caste."

"Says the poet Rahim, 'If asked for, the potter's wheel will not give even a lamp. But if a stick is inserted into the hole and rotated you can get even a pot.'"

One of the officers asks the other who had recited the couplet by poet Rahim to explain the couplet with reference to the context. In reply she gives her own explanation with sexual innuendos much to the discomfiture of Savri Devi.

The woman police officer turns to the rape victim and asks her,

"How many people were they?"

When she does not say anything after listening to the lewd jokes of the women police officers, one of the latter says,

"Why do you feel shame in a women police station?"

"Come on, tell, how many people raped you?"

"Five people did the injustice to me, madam."

"Injustice?"

"You are acting too innocent."

"Very lucky girl!"

"Five. Five. All my life is over spending with just one man."

(Laughter)

The third clipping is a scene from the court where the judgment is pronounced on the gang rape. The judge states that after having examined the merits and demerits of the case and the arguments put forth by both sides,

"the court has come to a conclusion that all the proofs produced in this case, the statement of the witnesses and the reports, by not vindicating the case, goes against the prosecution side and on the contrary to the petitioner, helps the accused. During the case a few important topics were established before the court:

1. Rape can be a crime committed normally in youthful zest. In declining age, violent sex cannot be a recreation."

The social organizer who was the chief inspiration behind filing the case in the court and who was a tremendous moral and financial support to Savri Devi interjects at this point and tells the judge,

"Mr. Judge, this is not recreation, but a matter of injustice which was done to show Savri low down."

Another member of a women's voluntary organization shouts out,

"This is not about sex; it's about subjugation."

The judge calls the audience to order and continues with the pronouncement of the judgment.

"2. In India and especially in villages where there is discrimination in castes, the people of higher caste, are reluctant even to touch the people of the lower caste. In such circumstances, the accused having a physical relationship with such a woman, cannot be believed."

The women gathered in the court room shout,

"Why can't you believe; this has taken place." "This is exploitation."

The judge calls the audience to order and continues to pronounce his judgment:

"The court also fails to understand the fact that in the same respected family the younger and the older family members are openly engaged with one woman in a gang rape. This is absolutely unnatural and obnoxious. The Indian community and especially the village culture is not stooped down to such a level as has been shown in this case. And in the Indian culture this is absolutely not possible that a husband who in front of the divine fire promises to protect his wife's respect and modesty, keeps watching his wife getting raped in front of his own eyes and does nothing to relieve or save her respect."

The women gathered in the courtroom protest,



"But these brutal people had detained this poor man. They made him half dead by constantly hitting him with sticks".

The judge quells the shouting in the courtroom and continues to read out:

"That is why this court under IPC (Indian Penal Code) Section 149, 354 and 376, drops all the charges against the five accused and releases them free."

"This is not justice; this is injustice." shout the women in the courtroom.

All the three scenes take place in places that are hallowed as the sanctum of power – the police station, the women's police station and the courtroom. In all the three scenes it is the male way of looking at women that is the common denominator. Although women police stations, which are a comparatively recent innovation, created with the express objective of safeguarding women's interests, they are no different from an ordinary police station staffed by male officers. Once inside khaki coloured uniforms, irrespective of the fact whether it is a male embodied person or female embodied person within the uniform, he or she represents the power of the state.

Power is masculine and whoever wishes to partake of power has to behave in masculine ways. Or else they will not be deemed to be effective. Women in their zest to gain acceptability and recognition in the world of power, which is essentially a male domain, use the very same filthy language and crack the very same lewd jokes as their male counterparts, at their sisters because these are the demands of the role expectations of a police officer. An officer in uniform has to be aggressive, brutal, spewing out obscene language – in short make himself/herself too intimidating to be accessible to ordinary mortals. This accounts for the masculinisation of women in the police force and many other women in positions of power.

Power expresses itself and operates in specific manners and its script is writ large on the body of women, which becomes the site of domination. For the upper caste gang of men comprising old and young men the rape was intended to prove their superiority and domination over the woman of the low caste. It was an attempt "to show her place" in society. If for the police officers, both male and female, the victim of the gang rape becomes an object of lustful references, in the court room again, during the trial she is subjected to humiliation by the bawdy references to her body during cross examination. The victim of rape is thus subjected to multiple rapes, several times after the initial physical rape – in police stations, sometimes in the hospitals where she goes for medical report and very severely in the courtroom. These are the places, which Michael Foucault refers to as "the ultimate destinations" of power, "those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions" (Foucault 1980:96). Foucault continues,

What is needed is a study of power in its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there – that is to say – where it installs itself and produces its real effects (Foucault 1980:97).

The regional and local institutions like the police stations, hospitals and court rooms, the external visage of power, the points where power produces its real effects, are definitely not women friendly; on the contrary they are hostile to women. These 'ultimate destinations' of power, through which the nation expresses itself, fails to protect the interest of the women. In the name of 'common' interest it protects and promotes men's interest. (At best it may be tolerant of women's interest as long as it does not impinge on men's interest.) Lack of a sense of belonging to a group which in turn is engendered by the fact and knowledge of equal justice to all members within the group, will lead to a sense of alienation. In a milieu that fosters the Orwellian theory of "All are equal but some are more equal", the group coherence would vanish like clay that has lost its plasticity. Those who are not "more equal" will suddenly find themselves in the position of the 'outsiders' in the group. Thus women are treated as 'outsiders' within the nation into which they are born and for which they toil to reproduce and replenish its members.

The interstitial space between 'women' and 'nation' in the movie becomes the site of contestation where competing interests enact the power game. The interrelation between 'women' and 'nation' becomes, to use a Foucaultian term, "the site of biopower", that structures the sexual politics in modern India. Once the gang rape comes under the glare of international media attention, the victim is made a pawn in the hands of opportunists and political parties. If the state government casts stones at her, the opposition party that rules the central government honours her for her courage and assures her a huge monetary assistance.

The video clippings show how the nation itself is complicit in institutionalizing the subordination of its women. Yet at the same time it portrays how women in their own ways subvert the disciplining of the female citizen subjects by the nation. It is heartening to note that some of the Bollywood movies have begun to leave spaces for transgressive images of women.

In India there is a festival called 'Navaratri' (meaning 'nine nights') celebrated for nine nights in the lunar month of Ashwina and dedicated to the Divine Mother in her various manifestations like Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi. Beautiful dolls of gods and goddesses are arranged in steps in a '*kolu*', lamps lit, prayer songs sung and offerings of rice cooked in jaggery and various cooked lentils are offered to guests; and little children are initiated into the world of knowledge on the last day. Once the festival is over these beautifully decked up dolls are stored in a big box and closed and consigned to some dark corner of the house or attic. People forget

about them and remember them only when the next festival season approaches when they are taken out of their dingy spaces, dusted and worshipped again.

Women in India are like the dolls of '*kolū*' taken out of their dingy boxes or spaces for the limited purpose of reproducing the nation. In this 'limited nation', they are accorded a symbolic status for the limited purpose of reproduction and once the women perform their role, they are consigned to oblivion and neglect. In independent India, they had not been permitted to participate in the governance of the nation in any meaningful manner. The constitutional amendments in 1993, guaranteeing one third of the seats in local self-governments to women, is a positive step in the right direction but the next logical step of earmarking quotas in the legislative assemblies and parliament has been put to cold storage since it was introduced in the parliament in 1996, as accommodating women means giving up the privileges enjoyed by men for decades together. Democratic decentralization with quota for women at the local level forms the backdrop of the second movie discussed in this paper.

The 'hegemonic masculinity' that dominates other subordinated masculinities as well as 'emphasized femininities' points the accusing finger at the husband (of the victim in the movie) who was beaten up to immobility, for not protecting his wife in the face of gang rape. The judge invokes the village culture to discount the prosecution charge that the husband was immobilized by grievous injury before the gang rape. The judge believes that the village culture has not degenerated to such an extent that the husband who has taken a matrimonial vow to protect his wife, remains a passive spectator to his wife's gang rape. Here both the subordinated masculinity and femininity become the defendants in the courtroom. The police are not able to mete out justice to an aggrieved woman. The judiciary takes a blatantly male view of the whole incident, of the predator rather than the prey. It is this total failure of the state to protect women's interest that persuaded Virginia Woolf to say, 'Our country,' she will say,

throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions... In fact as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country (Woolf 1938:108, 109).

Thus the nation that is supposed to be the guardian angel of its citizens does not protect the interests of its women. The nation by not protecting the interests of its women excludes women from the nation while symbolically upholding women as representing the nation. The laws and rules enacted in law-making bodies dominated by male members are male-created and male-centered. When the law looks upon actions of injustice with unconcern, when the nation looks upon injustice with indifference or impotence, it forces women like Phoolan Devi, whose story was immortalized through the movie "Bandit Queen", to take law into their own hands.

Nevertheless the very fact that, in a country like India where a raped girl was not always looked upon sympathetically, the victim dared to lodge a complaint against the men of the upper caste and had her case filed in the court, is a first step in breaking the silence that shrouds women's oppression. In the real life story upon which the movie is based, although the rape victim lost the case she has filed an appeal and is awaiting justice in the higher court and the battle continues. It is indeed a never-ending battle for women.

The second movie called '**Godmother**' directed by Vinay Shukla is about a woman called Rambhi who joins politics and takes revenge on the murder of her husband. She contests election successfully to the *panchayat*, which is the lowest village level unit of administration in India. Her first encounter with the gendered dimension of nation is seen in the first clipping, wherein the contractor who did a bad job of installing hand pumps for water demands that his payment be made, but she refuses to make the payment due to the poor quality of work and the execution of work merely on paper and not on ground. The member of the legislative assembly who is higher up in the power hierarchy blackmails her into agreeing to make the payment. Although she agrees to make the payment, Rambhi, who had learned from her murdered husband that "politics is a tantalizing game" starts playing that game. The contractor is murdered just before receiving his payment.

In the second clipping, a man approaches her with a complaint that his brother had seized his property without being properly compensated for the same. Rambhi asks him,

"What is the property worth?"

"No less than 30 *lakhs*" he replies.

[Here the reference is to the Indian rupees. 10 *lakhs* make one million]

She calls her henchman and orders him to give the complainant 15 *lakhs* of rupees and to transfer the property in the name of her son and to deal with the brother of the complainant appropriately later on.

In yet another scene, one of her loyal followers, Bachubhai, arrives with the tidings that disciplinary action is going to be initiated against her at the instigation of the local member of the legislative assembly, Kesubhai. The cause of the imminent action is the murder of the contractor, Lakhubhai that was engineered by her. Bachubhai tells her,

"A show cause notice is to be issued in your name from Delhi in the Lakhubhai matter. They are planning to expel you from the party."

"Break the party."

She retorts immediately.

"I will form my own party. Inform our legislators. Call a meeting at once and start the formalities."

She continues,

"This time, I will be the Chief Minister, not Kesubhai."

She concludes her talk with what she learned from her husband,

"Understood Bachubhai? Politics is a tantalizing game."

When Karsan tells his mother, Rambhi, that he loves Sejal, the marriage of her son is fixed with Sejal by the parents of the girl and Rambhi. But when Sejal approaches Rambhi with a request to rescind the engagement as she is in love with a Muslim boy, much to her initial disappointment, she takes the initiative in seeing the lovers married off in the face of severe opposition from the *Mer* community to which Rambhi and Sejal belong. The opposition to this inter religious marriage is fanned and exploited by the local member of the legislative assembly, Kesubhai to his advantage and it flares up into a full blown communal violence resulting in great destruction of public property.

Risking her life, braving the stones pelted at her van and flames thrown at her vehicle, she drives down to the community hall where at the initiative of the local member of the legislative assembly a meeting of the *Mer* community is in progress. As she steps into the hall she listens to her brother-in-law, Meru, her diseased husband Veeram's brother, who was hitherto carefully manipulated by Kesubhai, speak:

"There can be only one decision. Whoever has brought dishonour to the *Mer* community should not be spared. We'll all risk our lives to save our community's honour. I've come to safeguard Veeram's honour.

My sister-in-law is not Seeta, but my brother was Ram. Like Lakshman, I'll draw the *Lakshmanrekha* with my blood."

The reference here is to the story in the Indian epic "Ramayana" wherein the evil king Raavana seduces Lord Rama's wife Seeta. Raavana in order to ensure that Seeta is all alone separates Seeta and Rama and his brother Lakshmana by simulating the agonized cry of a hunted animal that Rama goes to rescue. Before Lakshmana goes in search of his brother leaving Seeta behind, Lakshmana draws a line (*Lakshmanarekha*) around her telling her, come what may, she should not cross the boundaries of the line. When Seeta is left alone Raavana comes in the guise of a holy saint seeking alms standing at some distance away from the line that Lakshmana drew. She crosses the line to give the saint alms. She is abducted by Raavana who carries her to his kingdom Lanka.

Rambhi walks into the community hall, when her brother-in-law asserts that he will draw the *Lakshmanarekha* around Rambhi with his blood.

She enters the podium, disheveled and takes the mike in her hand. She lashes at the evil forces that try to constrict her.

"Meru says, he will draw the *Lakshmanrekha*. Go ahead and draw it! Seeta had also crossed the *Lakshmanrekha*. Not to dishonour Lakshman, but to honour tradition. Tradition says that the saint must not go back empty handed. But what can Seeta do if the saint turns out to be Raavan? Raavan trapped Seeta because she did not break tradition. To save society from Raavan let tradition be broken. I also broke the tradition. I married off a *Mer* girl to a Muslim boy. Not to dishonour the community; because the two of them would have killed themselves. The community does not teach you to take lives. The one who aspires for power teaches you to take lives. The one who wants to encash votes... like Kesubhai... like me...

What has he done for the community till now? What have I done?

Only we have reaped the benefits.

I broke the law openly... killed people... I am a murderess...

You people trusted me but I've betrayed you. You people have honoured me but I stabbed you in the back.

I swear on Mother Kandhli today I've done one honest deed. I have broken my Karsan's heart and got Asad and Sejal married.

Seeing their love... no longer was I a mother or a *Mer*.

Now you can punish me in any way you like. Shoot me... hang me... I'll accept it.

I am happy that tomorrow a child will be born who will belong to the community... that of human beings."

The two movies I have cited are not the typical Bollywood movies – they are deviations from the traditional portrayal of women in normal movies in which women are the silent sufferers, movies which depict 'emphasized femininity'. Women are painted differently in the two movies but the brush with which they are painted is harsh. Women are shown to transgress boundaries but the pendulum swings to the other end. Although women are portrayed as powerful, they are shown in men's term in these male-created movies. Many women in these movies are male stereotypes, negative stereotypes that fail to bring out the positive aspects of strength and power.

Power as represented in these movies is like a palace with a magic spell. Any one who wishes to enter its portals has to don a cloak of masculinity; if one does not have it one acquires it at the entrance. Once the cloak is worn, the spell begins to work. Whoever has entered the palace becomes aggressive, domineering, lusty of wealth and greedy of more power. Once inside the palace, the enchanted visitor passes through a vicious cycle of craving to scale greater heights of power and to achieve those heights, resorting to unscrupulous modes of remaining in power.

Rambhi entered politics as a novice and wanted to bring water to the villagers. But the contractor who did a fake job, had her pressured to make payment to him; but like in a game of chess she cautiously studied each move of her opponent and moved her pawns accordingly. She uses filthy language and smokes when tensed up. (Smoking cigarettes is a habit

generally associated with men in the villages.) She becomes ruthless when arranging the murder of the contractor and prior to that the murder of Fogo, the murderer of her husband. When disciplinary action is contemplated against her by the party high command, she breaks away from the political party and forms her own party. Now her eyes are set on the Chief Minister's chair. The magic spell of power takes her to dizzy heights.

Despite the current representations of the masculinization of power, there are alternative modes of operation and expression of power. Power can be made co-operative and democratic. If we keep our eyes and ears open there will be no dearth of models of power that are employed, not for personal aggrandizement, but used very potently to transform the surrounding society, for greater distributive justice and for empowerment of the disenfranchised. Unfortunately these paradigms are not captured or highlighted by the directors and producers, the majority of whom are men. What we need is an increasing number of women producers, directors and script writers with feminist sensitivity, to make inroads into the male bastions of media and to represent the alternative modes of power, to de-masculinize power and to humanize it. We need women who would dare to transgress the *Lakshmanrekhas* drawn by the limited and limiting nation.

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## ROD I NAROD: TRADICIJA I TRANZICIJA

### SAŽETAK

Masovni su mediji najvažnije sjedište konstrukcije, trženja i perpetuiranja slika "ženstvenosti" u Indiji. Najveća filmska industrija u svijetu nalazi se u Bombayu, znanom i kao Bollywood (po analogiji s Hollywoodom), a posjeduju je moćni biznismeni, izrazito patrijarhalna mentalnog sklopa. Kako onaj tko plaća uvjetuje i ono što plaća, nije čudno da se patrijarhalne vrijednosti producenata zrcale u filmovima koje sponzoriraju. Ove konstruirane slike ženstvenosti kao poslušnosti, samo-poništenja, žrtve i čednosti institucionaliziraju se putem najmoćnijeg od svih masovnih medija, filma. Pa ipak, odnedavna i muškarci i žene kao producenti i redatelji žestoko osporavaju tradicionalne prikazbe indijskih žena. Kako bi se istaknula ta promjena, u članku se raspravlja o četirima indijskim filmovima koje su napravile autorice iz indijske dijaspore u Sjevernoj Americi.

Ključne riječi: suvremeni indijski film, prikazbe žena