

PATRIARCHY AND GENDERED SPACES: EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITY OF WOMEN EXPERIENCES WITH “THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN”

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ABSTRACT

Bell hooks define feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and Oppression” It aims at transforming and reshaping the perspective of masculinity and femininity of the socially constructed categories of the gender power relation. Gender identities are mapped on the basis of choice, care, experience, spaces and time. The gendered spheres work with the binaries between the productions versus reproduction, paid versus the unpaid work, public versus the private, where the value of each depends on the participation in which gender inequalities are experienced through women’s unequal access to public life within the patriarchal underpinnings. Indian Cinema is a cultural and social role player where depiction of male is valorised and women support the male character. Feminism based Indian films are less in number which concentrates on the empowerment and not majorly from the standpoint of women experiences. This paper explores the spatial distributed power relation of gender and the role of Patriarchy, its complexities in domestic space “Kitchen” by examining the Indian Film “The Great Indian Kitchen”. Feeding is one of the care concepts in which women have a high cultural value by affirming family relationship and achieve identity and celebrated as a mother or a women, where she never receive any kind of nurturance. Using Qualitative methodology, semiotic analysis will be used to study the signifiers and signified meanings of space and its relation to power and structural inequality through the patriarchal lens in Indian Context.

Keywords: *Gender, Power, Patriarchy, Cinema, women experience, Semiotics*

INTRODUCTION

Cinema creates a significant landmark in society by documenting time and lives of people of various cultures, thus plays a powerful means of communication to a large diversified audience. Cinema reflects society and it’s a big cultural agent leading to social changes. The technical advancement of cinema helps to create realistic images through editing and camera angles. Various parameters like dialogues, shots, symbols and mise-en-scene gives proposed ideologies like Marxism, liberalism, feminism to audience crafting an emotional response and altering or to maintain the existing belief systems and opinions. Thus cinema plays a powerful role on social change. Since inception Women in cinema occupies a less space more on supportive, submissive

role, few cinemas make the women as subject where most of the feminism based films address the empowerment. Very few films address the patriarchal issues and the experiences and inner trauma a women faces. This paper deals with how women's experiences are voiced out and the reasons behind the oppression women face by analysing a film "The great Indian Kitchen".

INDIAN CINEMA

Indian Cinema is an umbrella term for the films which is produced in India. It is divided in five fragments the Hindi cinema, Tamil cinema, Malayalam cinema, Kannada cinema and Telugu cinema. There are more than 20 language films are produced in India and statistics shows that Indian generated 72.2 billion rupees through Indian film Industry and consistently being the world's largest producer since 2007.

India saw its first motion picture "Raja Harishchandra" in 1913 by Dada Saheb Phalke who is known as "Father of Indian Cinema". Initially Movies were based on Mythological stories like Ramayana and Mahabharata, Later the history and Social issues where the central subject moving to family, love and romance. With the help of OTT Indian cinema is now reaching a wider international audience where the Indian film stars have their on fan base all over the world.

GENDER

The term sex and gender is often confusing and by the end of 20th century expanding the appropriate usage of both terms was more challenging especially in legal term. Then people started to understand the difference that sex refers to the physiological or physical differences such as reproductive systems between male and female, whereas Gender refers to cultural or social distinction which is associated of being a male or female. Gender identity another term that refers to the masculinity or femininity which is more on performativity. Gender role is another term which is used to understand the society's concept on how a men or women are expected to act or behave, based on the standards and norms created by the society. Thus society plays a major role in socialization and expectations from men and women that occur through four major agents: Family, education, mass media and peer group. As family is the first agent of socialization gender role expectation is built right from the childhood, which on reinforcement leads to gender stereotypes.

An Analysis of Gender Roles in Regional Indian Cinema

The portrayal of gender roles in Indian cinema is best understood by placing it within a larger context, as is seen in the film "The Great Indian Kitchen" (Patriarchy and Gendered Spaces). This study compares and contrasts Bollywood-style films with Bengali and Kannada films to examine gender roles and cultural themes.

Bengali Cinema's Intellectual Approach

Bengali cinema, renowned for its intellectual and artistic endeavors, frequently challenges traditional narratives. Films from this region have historically oscillated between reinforcing and disrupting gender norms. The cinema of the mainstream, though, often puts women in the position of traditionally accepted virtues. However, it was a segment of Bengali movie stars who pioneered telling complex and multi-dimensional tales with women as protagonists, challenging stereotypes. However, not only do they applaud female dominance in their films, they also sharply criticize the particular aspects of social structure that usually ascertain gender assumptions.

Storytelling in Kannada Cinema:

The issue of gender fairness in Kannada cinema might be divided and polarized. Here are films which serve to cement the ideas of traditional gender roles in our minds just as those that advance the cause of fighting long held patriarchal beliefs by depicting gender identities. Unlike this, portraying transgender people in Kannada films as villains or comedic actors, sadly, represents them in an extremely negative sense; instead of accepting them, it only continues the destructive stereotype. Even though cinema faces such challenges, we can certainly refer to a film like "Thithi" as an example of a story that changes people's perceptions by challenging conventional thinking and offering a fresh breath into the issue of social roles.

This comparative study shows that regional narratives are indeed powerful and contribute greatly to society's formation in terms of the way they perceive and portray gender. Even though the Bollywood impact has become pervasive, the Bengali and Kannada movies play a vital role in the establishment of gender norms or their demolition, thereby indicating their influence on these prevailing norms. Attention should be paid to the fact that each destination of the program complements others each other and fulfills its dedicated role within the entire picture. To sum up, the Indian patriarchal film build-up comprises techniques of distancing women from front-end characterization and giving them few dialogues. Here, the saying "life is the art of possibility" is not a personal experience of dealing with gender bias in the household, but presenting it with a critical eye. On the other hand, gender roles discover themselves, as they know through the deliberations of the actor..The Great Indian Kitchen is the one among the very vast sub-genres that range from the grand epics to modern-day perceptive films that constitute the corpus of the contemporary Indian cinema. The gender roles, power struggles, and resistance in Indian cultural traditions continue to be endless reasons of debate. Use my interpretation of the film to enjoy the contribution it has made to the ongoing debate.

Comparative Analysis of Gendered Domestic Spaces in Cinema Across Cultures

The Great Indian Kitchen: A Microcosm of Indian Domestic Gender Dynamics

'The Great Indian Kitchen', a Malayalam movie by Jeo Baby, in delineating the kitchen a place of exclusion for women in Indian context stretches its storyline to a great deal. Through this the

movie, we actualize the endless work and status of being women in traditional Indian home that are set across the background of conservative home in Kerala. The protagonist, enacted by Nimisha Sajayan, walks through the cramped corridors of her marital home, where the kitchen is a platform for gender wars where historical misogynistic values and patriarchal principles which is the essence of her daily life are recognized. The context of this scene's realistic description is that women's family roles are highly expected to be associated with non-stop domestic chores. This portrays a situation where the authority and control of women is denied such that men enjoy more leisure and free time than women.

Hollywood: Evolving Portrayals of Domestic Spaces

Domestic spaces are depicted by Hollywood in a blending of a classical as well as modern stories' treatments. The American film industry comprehends portraying relationships within domestic spaces through different genres of romantic comedies involving in freezing the outdated gender roles and yet feeding them a little in the process. Such avoidance helps to avoid the struggle of the gender roles being displayed at domestic scenes where the men are depicted as disruptive elements which signify the ongoing negotiation of these roles. Yet, movies in Hollywood could propose stories in which the norms are questioned showing tasks of home care done more in agreement by both partners, and so Hollywood stories would appear to be in accordance with the changes in the socially oriented viewpoints about gender equality at home.

Middle Eastern Cinema: Cultural Nuances in Domestic Portrayals

The Middle Eastern film industry provides a rich palette of movies that reflect own unique cultural and religious rituals and traditions within the domestic space in which characters create their own destinies and lives often against the backdrop of social taboos and cultural norms. These cinemas will show not only on the influence of gender, but will also include scenes that illustrate gender dynamics at home. In contrast to the frequently presented polarizing idiom of gender usually on view in "The Great Indian Kitchen," the Middle Eastern films would perhaps illustrate a more nuanced intersection of gender, culture and domestic life, though it may still bear the burden of patriarchal societal norms.

Synthesizing Global Perspectives on Domestic Cinematic Spaces

Through this contrasting effect the analyzed movie qualities demonstrate the ways in which various cultures approach, account for, and create filmic representations of domestic space that carry gendered messages. In light of patriarchal criticism in the "The great Indian Kitchen" and subdued portrayals of the relationships in Hollywood and Middle East cinemas there is a dialectic between the cinema and the societal norms in regard to woman's roles within their specific cultures. Through an understanding of these portrayals, we are able to admire the individual ethnic and domestic gender portrayals across the global cinema landscape, offering insights into the universal

and also the contextually-shaped gender manifestations within the privacy of the most private spaces.

FEMINISM AND PATRIARCHY

According to Britannica dictionary Feminism is the belief in political, social and economic equality of sexes which was stated through organized activity or movement on the women's interest and rights by advancing the position of women. The term feminism is often having a misconception as anti-male which is completely false. Feminism is comprised of equal position and equal rights for women. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft's "A vindication of the Rights of Woman, she proposed a challenging notion that women and men should be given equal opportunities in work, politics and education and women as as rational as men and not born only to please men.

Bell Hooks an intersectional feminist defined "Feminism is movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" So feminism addresses the subordinate status, discrimination a women encounters because of her sex.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social disease as stated by bell hooks and it's a socio-political system that insist male are inherently superior and dominating to everyone and everything deemed to be weak especially women and endowed to the right to dominate through various forms and is reinforced through every institutions and agents like family, school, peers and mass media. The gender identities we are expected to make are based on the patriarchal values and beliefs.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

As mentioned above, Mass media plays a significant agent role in socialization where majorly commercials, film and television make women to act in submissive or passive roles and stereotype gender roles which stereotypes gender identity. It's a debatable topic, whether media reflects society or society imitates the role played in media. Still media is considered as a powerful agent in gender roles and gender identity in socialization process. So studying the role of women on screen and understanding the place provided can help to alter and better position the screen as well as real life situation of them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anjali Ram (2002) in her paper titled "Framing Feminine: Diasporic Readings of Gender in Popular Indian Cinema" states that Indian Cinema is aggressive in Valorisation of Cultural Identity and the Narratives privilege Masculine Subject and feminine Object.

Zarina Maharaj (1995) in "A Social Theory of Gender: Connell's "Gender and Power" states that Gender order refers the abstract structural Inventory generating gendered experience and the

Dynamic relationship between the institutions of society is shaping gendered experiences across society

Johnson, L. C. (1990) in “Gendering domestic space: a feminist perspective on housing” states that women are oppressed by existing social relations and unequal structure which privileges men and the domestic space is not only gendered by also patriarchal giving the power to men at the expense of women. And the women space is bounded by their roles and men by power.

Meah, A. (2014) in “Reconceptualizing power and gendered subjectivities in domestic cooking spaces” states that kitchen mirrors the house than any other room and is conceptualised as space rather than place and represent a site of self-awareness, degree of freedom and changing levels of agency and subjectivities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To explore the spatially distributed power relation of gender roles and gender identity and its complexities in Indian society.
- To study the experiences of women and their inner dimensions while feeding the family.
- To analyse how women are oppressed in the domestic space through patriarchal ideology.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How gender roles play and add complexities in gender identity?
2. In what ways the cultural values oppress the status of women in society?
3. How kitchen is glorified and women’s spaces are bounded by their roles?

RESEARCH DESIGN

To examine the Patriarchy and Gendered spaces and its complexity of women experiences with “The Great Indian Kitchen” Qualitative descriptive methodology is adopted. Qualitative methodology will generally be used to explore and understand the complex social environments and people’s experience.

To analyse the movie, semiotic analysis is used where the space, the women occupies and the kitchen utensils, menstruation, nature and position are taken as signifiers and interpreted to explore the women’s experiences and her inner complexities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist standpoint Theory

Sandra Harding distinguished the feminism standpoint as the central claim is which knowledge is generated from a particular standpoint through women’s experiences is built upon. In standpoint we can understand the power structures and the knowledge that is produced to benefit the

marginalised groups. This knowledge can adopt a particular perspective which we call as feminist perspective. Standpoint theorist claim that the knowledge is at community level rather than individuals. To simply say standpoint is a group consciousness that occurs through a process of transformative criticism by evaluating the beliefs and experiences of individuals that constitute the epistemic group.

Feminist Archetypal Theory

Archetypal theory developed by Carl Jung is from the Male perspective and to give voice and value for women, Feminist Archetypal Theory was edited and published as interdisciplinary revisions of Jungian thought edited by Estella Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupperecht. Feminist archetype touched the depth of psychological dimensions of existence of women which include the range of women's experiences. This theory is an investigative process that raises awareness about the cultural norms, values, laws and language that was largely developed by men and how feminism seeks to validate these. Archetype may be universal and has the tendency to form and reform images in relation to certain kinds of repeated experiences and it's a social constructed reality. Instead of freeing women, Patriarchal society plays an important role by defining appropriate images and behaviours for women and stereotypic roles are reinforced on them. Language is one such aspect to reinforce cultural stereotypes on women and the aura of numinosity with the religious legitimization is added to these stereotyped experiences.

SAMPLES

To analyse the patriarchal power relationship and gendered spaces in Indian Cinema, Film from Malayalam Language "The great Indian Kitchen" is taken under non-probability sampling techniques, where purposive sampling method is used to select the particular movie. The film plot revolves around the mind-set of a newly married women who was very ambitious to be a dancer and the how she is being occupied in the kitchen space and the routines she do to please the men in the family to maintain or sustain her position of being a wife under patriarchal structure and by holding the cultural pride and to prove to be an ideal wife and daughter in law of the family with no option. The inner trauma she experiences the whole day, where the husband and father in law just enjoy the delicious fresh prepared meal by the women in the home and live a careless life without understanding the inner feelings and expectations of the newly joined family member.

The total duration of the film is one hour forty Minutes in which video from 1:30 minutes to 1:40 minutes, the final climax scene is analysed with Semiotic analysis.

From 27:38 seconds to 28:29 seconds is used to do comparative analysis within the scene and from 11:29 seconds to 12: 40 seconds is compared with scene happening between 1:34:30 seconds to 1:35:23 seconds with Semiotic analysis.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Some Women embraces patriarchy

In the great Indian Kitchen movie there are two scenes when the newly married girls complains about the food to be prepared and about menstruation and its ritual customs the mother of the girl tells to accept the family customs and obey it blindly and to feel lucky to get such a prestigious family.

Another relative women from the groom side comes and serves the family during the menstruation of the girl, whereas she constantly scolds and advices the girl how to behave during the time and how to follow the customs.

Culture and Menstruation

Two instances where shown in the film where the girl undergoes her menstruation and she is completely asked to confine in a small room where she is not allowed to access the other parts of the house. In the second instance of her menstruation the men in the family plans to start the fasting rituals for Lord Iyyapan and to visit sabarimalai temple, the confinement is even more strict by not to see the men in the family for complete seven days and the aunty who comes to help the family orders and advices on how to behave. On scene the husband who starts to work skids and fell at the entrance of the house where the wife runs, touches to save help him in panic forgetting about the menstrual restrictions, she is been highly insulted and the husband approaches the Guruswamy where he advices to drink cow urine or eat cow dung to get rid of the doshams and to take a dip in river at first stage.

Man vs. Woman in Patriarchal world

The men and the women share the same space in the home where the women spends her majority of timing in Kitchen where the husband comes to the kitchen in two scene one when he is newly married to the girl, spends some time by having a tea while she is cooking and again the same scene is repeated with his second wife at the end of the movie apart from that the women always, chop, grind, knead, cook, wash vessels and wash clothes parallel to this the men in the house do yoga, spends time in phone, eat and sleep.

When the wife points the table manners of the husband and requests for foreplay as sexual expectations, the husband makes her to apologize her for the no mistake of hers proves he is the decision maker. As the girl expects to start her career as dance teacher the father in Law appreciates the role of women is irreplaceable and cannot be compared with ministers and bureaucrats and stops her from starting her career. In a scene where the husband orders her to remove the post she shared about sabarimala issue and when she refuses, the husband warns the girl to listen to him if she needs to stay in the house.



Breaking the Patriarchy

In the climax scene the girl walks away from the family which takes a duration of 1:30:33 to 1:31:55 seconds, the girl walks away from the home as she was no longer able to face the oppression, where the scene where used as signifiers as she walks away from her marriage life and family, walks away from the rituals and customs, walks away from the routine of taking care of the domestic works and walks away from the women who embraces the patriarchy and a shot will be there at 1:31:22 seconds where the waves are shown in the backgroud withthe sound of waves which symbolizes endlessness of her journey and her inner emotions of disturbed feeling with the sound of waves where in shot 1:31:33 a bird flies and the background shows the ocean with sky and the sound of waves are going down symbolozing that, she is attaining her balance and peace internally, having some hope, strength and power to face the future.



Woman replaces a woman

There are two scenes that can be compared where when the women menstruates and the customs says she need to be isolated, another women in the name of a friend or relative comes and plays the same role of occupying the domestic kitchen and household chores and the men are not taking the charge. And in the climax where the girl comes out of the family, another girl with same orange colour salwar is replacing her in the role of a wife and it signifies that in the initial scene with the heroine the wife 1 is placed in the left of the husband signifying she is on the leftist ideology which emphasis equality, freedom, rights and progress where the wife 2 who comes in the climax after wife 1 walks away is placed in the same kitchen where she is occupying the right side of the husband which reflects the rightist ideology emphasizing the notions such as hierachy, authority and tradition.



FINDINGS

The movie gives a strong notion that certain women embraces and stay with patriarchy where the mother character, relative aunt and group of women who protest to preserve the religious customs, means women are also the root cause for the patriarchal oppression.

The gender role is maintained through the film where the role of women in the kitchen and domestic work is replaced by another woman and the men took no charge in cleaning, cooking and maintaining the house.

Menstruation is one parameter used as patriarchal oppression where it's seen as impure and the women is confined, restricted and isolated in daily routines and religious customs and rituals. Woman under the patriarchal family should follow the norms and customs failing to do so she will be punished or thrown away from the structure as shown in the movie where the girl is either shamed for her behaviour and finally walks away.



According to Feminist Archetypal theory and its investigative process that raises awareness on the cultural norms, values, laws and language that was largely developed by men and how feminism seeks to validate these. Patriarchy in relation to certain kinds of repeated experiences and it's a social constructed reality. Instead of freeing women, Patriarchal society plays an important role by defining appropriate images and behaviours for women and stereotypic roles are reinforced on them.

CONCLUSION

The movie highlights how patriarchy confines and cuts down the dreams and independence of an ambitious girl who wishes to pursue her career. In patriarchy the men is the deciding authority and so the women act, which is depicted throughout the movie. In Patriarchy, when the woman does not obey the rules they would be punished and so the heroine walks away, as well as apologizes for no mistake of hers when she points out the mistake of the men. Patriarchy requires male domination and women to work with no rewards. The movie depicts that the women in the family should work all seven days and take care of the family by feeling fresh meals where no care is given in return as nature of caring and nurturance is all a female role. Thus patriarchy makes the men powerful and women powerless. Culture plays an important role in holding the patriarchy by protecting the rule of the father. Men do oppress women in all forms under the patriarchal hierarchy. As stated by Judith Butler, Gender is all about repeated public "performance" which reinforces gender identity leading to stereotypes and surrendering to patriarchy.

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