Review Paper

An Aesthetic Appraisal of Cinematic Art-Reality Interface with Specific Reference to Portrayal of Women in Current Hindi Films: A Review

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
	When we mention Aesthetic appraisal, we inadvertently bring in the Philosophical analysis of the concepts of art, craft, a relation of comparison and contrast between art and craft, terms like rasa, disinterestedness and emphasise on the denotations of the look, the gaze, subjectivity, objectification and gender in context. Since Art and Gender cut across all academic disciplines, I have used some inter-disciplinary references from Sociology, Literature, Film studies and Gender theories to situate them in a Philosophical Analysis. The paper has been elaborated using references from concepts used in Philosophical-Aesthetic discourse like Presentation and Representation, Aesthetic attitude, Aesthetic judgment, Aesthetic communication and Aesthetic experience explained as Delight. However, I have referred more to traditional Indian approaches to Aesthetic experience with allusions to parallel terms found in traditional western theories and in the contemporary popular discourse. The paper then dwells on cinematic art in relation to real-life/ social-cultural reality with specific reference to portrayal of women, and concludes by using these deliberations in some cases of Hindi language films from recent years.

Introduction

The paper dwells, primarily, on Philosophic-Aesthetic conceptual analysis of the cinematic art in relation to real-life/ social-cultural reality with the specific reference to portrayal of women. Art is a part of culture or a concrete reflection of culture in various public media. In fact, art is component of culture which cannot be isolated from the philosophical, religious, scientific, moral and social aspects. As a popular form of art, Cinema is meant and believed to entertain, to take the viewer to a world that is starkly different from the real one, a world which provides escape from the daily grind of life. Yet, it represents the lived reality in a way that it can provide a model to emulate.

Methodology and Resource References

The methodology of the paper is descriptive and interpretive, and hence a review analysis. References and resources have been used largely from Disciplines of Philosophy. Since, the theme of the paper is inter-disciplinary, some from Gender Theories, Film Studies and Sociology. I have used examples of four movies from popular Hindi movies of recent years to substantiate the thesis of my paper.

A. Cinema: Art, Craft and Technology

As an art form, the cinema is a captivating, though a complex form of art comprising of varied types like visual, performing, literary- all kinds of audio-visual art forms. It is simultaneously referred to as the craft since the medium of film is a machine, a movie camera, and cinema is basically an art of photography, **not a static one but the most dynamic one-it is one of the most evolving techniques with online/web series becoming the latest variant of it.** It is understood as the most inclusive of crafts which sometimes gets experienced purely as a timeless art.

Kishore Vasvani[1], a renowned scholar and film critic, considers a film as the seventh art, an amalgamation of the earlier six arts namely painting, architecture, visual art, dance, drama, music and literature. (Vasvani, 1998). According to him films have been analysed and appreciated on the parameters suitable to all forms of arts. Likewise, Shyamala Gupta in her work, *Art, Beauty and Creativity*[2], has similarly suggested that the cinematic art is a complex form of fine art, craft

and technology aided art.   (Gupta,1999). Both scholars concur od the point that like theatre cinema too thrives on performing arts like music and dance which are enacted by actors, is composed of a literary form of art delineated by its screen-play and script. Like a painting and photographs, the imagery on screen is pivotal to it. The form or genre of cinema may be varied as documentary, parallel, art, indie, commercial cinema etc. and the screen-play, script etc, form part of its contents.

'Hindi cinema is also popularly termed as Bollywood, and is one of the largest film industries in the world. Cinematic art form is the most popular one, in India and Films have been referred to as 'the cultural dominant of modern India'. (Mishra,V. 2009)[3.] The explorations in my paper are limited to popular *Bollywood* examples and have examined the portrayal of women in this dominant genre of Indian films.

While Cinema is mostly compared to theatre and to literature most scholars point out that it would be pertinent if it can be treated more on nuanced aspect of cinema as an autonomous art form rather than a 'medley' of arts. (Vasvani,1998a:35). However, for the present paper, I have confined my arguments on this comparison, just briefly. This brief comparison has been made to contextualise relation between cinematic art and the real -life world.

Shyamala Gupta cites the article "The Film Age" from the book *The Social History of Ar*t by Arnold Hauser to point out the pivotal difference about imagery and context of time and space between film and theatre. The most fundamental difference between the film and the other arts is that the boundaries of space and time, in cinematic canvas are fluid. In the plastic arts like paintings and in the performing arts like stage plays the spatial boundaries are marked and static. In literature, time has an ordered succession independent of the reader, and has a specific goal. (Paraphrased from Gupta ,1999a:218-219). In Films, these boundaries of space and time gets altered. Space and time become '**Fluid- unlimited, unfinished, an element with its own history, its own scheme and process of development.' (**Gupta,1999b:219).

B. Philosophical Analysis: Aesthetic Attitude, Aesthetic Judgment/Appraisal Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Communication

I have conceptualised my paper according to Philosophical analysis of the relation between art and the receiver of the art, i.e., between the film and its audience. The analysis is purely from the Philosophic discipline. Hence, references have been made to concepts of aesthetic attitude, Aesthetic Communication and aesthetic delight/experience with reference to parallels between Indian Theories of *Rasa*, *Sadharanikarana,* Western concept of Disinterestedness, Universality and relatability and an aesthetic, non-epistemic commune between the work of art, Cinema here and its experience.

The Traditional Indian View:

Aesthetic experience This competence enables the spectator to scale the heights of aesthetic enjoyment during a performance. has been traditionally defined as the ***rasa***. It is parallel to an understanding of a work of art (cinema here) or an experience following an appropriate communication between an art and the recipient of the art. Abhinavgupta (the 10th century thinker) analysed *Rasa,* a theory that was put fully in place by the second century A.D. by Bharata as something that goes beyond the realm of epic poetry and heroic drama. It applies to all the performing arts and would make a *rasikas* (connoisseurs) of us all. The primary aim was not a didactic depiction of elevated characters but to inspire the discerning connoisseurs, as Bharata suggested. Abhinavgupta added the concept of the aesthetic delight (*rasa)* by highlighting on the concept of oneness of emotions and sentiments (*sādhāranikarana*) felt by a spectator or a reader with the emotion portrayed by the characters in the celebrated and improvised theory of *rasa* in his seminal work, *Abhinavbhārti.* (Gupta, 1999c: 52-54)

Abhinavagupta's theory of rasa, notes Kailash Pati Mishra,4 is spectator-oriented and idealistic and emphasises on the power of the co-creative imagination by a sensitive(sahrdya) spectator. 'The spectator comes out of the time and space of both the character, and this phenomenon becomes feasible due to the generalised or universal nature of feelings or emotional states (state of sādhāranikarana). This competence enables the spectator to scale the heights of aesthetic enjoyment during a performance.' (Mishra, K.P. 2006)4.

 My argument, following the commentaries on Abhinavgupta's theory of *Rasa* in Abhinavbharti, is that in the context of Cinema as an art form which combines drama, music and the craft/technology of camera, the screenplay **has to communicate emotions** to the audience. The film maker's emphasis must be on the primacy of representing presenting the visuals that represent the universal sentiments *(sthayibhavas)* that are present in every human heart, i.e. those with which an audience can relate with. This aspect is specifically and critically relevant, for the audience, in deriving aesthetic joy from films.

Bharata's exposition of Drama or *Nātya* has entered deep into our culture and still unconsciously shapes and conditions the theatrics responses of our audience. It also shapes and conditions many formal elements in the popular Hindi Cinema. According to Sharad Deshpande,[5] two notions from Bharata's *Nātyaśāstra* are pertinent. They are representing the reality as it is (*lokadharmi*) and elements peculiar to drama brought forth through creative and imaginative reconstruction of depicting human reality into theatre (*nātyadharmi*). *Nātyadharmi*, in the context of films would imply representation or presentation of reality into cinematic art form through a creative re-rendering or through an idealised imaginative

construction. Music is one of the chief *nāṭyadharmis* in all theatre and dramatic tradition everywhere and it plays a large part in Hindi films. (Deshpande, (n-d-).

The western parallels to explain aesthetic delight following the aesthetic attitude can also be derived from the concept of **disinterestedness** and universal sympathy from 'Kantian synthesis of the subjectivity of the judgment of Taste with the objectivity of experiencing pleasure of the Beauty, as found in his *Critique of judgment.*'[6](Wenz, 2009).
Both the traditional Indian approach of a competent connoisseur and of Kantian reference of relishing Beauty with an attitude of disinterestedness point to the focal point of Philosophical Aesthetics- to situate the affective emotional references rendered via creative or imaginative re-constructions in Philosophical analysis by understanding and relating with the work of art, and in the context of this paper with Cinematic art, **without any preferential personalised biases**. **Aesthetics philosophises integration of reason and emotion. In other words, Aesthetic appraisal enables a communication of art with real life world-view.**

For the present paper, I have drawn **Aesthetic theory of communication** from **Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?*[7]** (Kindle edition, Leo Tolstoy. *What is Art?*). Leo Tolstoy's work can be referred as the seminal one on concretising **the relation between art and emotion.** Tolstoy propagated that 'art is a means of bringing the artist and the recipient on the same emotional plane. A work of art must cause the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with him who produces the art and with all those who simultaneously, previously, or subsequently receive the same impression. Art, in other words must communicate the emotions felt by the artist to whosoever comes in contact with it. It should pass on the emotions from one mind to the minds of other persons in the same manner as the germs of the infectious disease are passed from one body to another.' (Tolstoy, Kindle edition, 2014). **I have interpreted the word 'infect', used by Tolstoy, as being suggestive of an affective -extension/ affective-outreach of an emotion to reach the level of a commune of feelings, hence in generation of empathy.**

Hence, **Aesthetic Communication resulting in Aesthetic experience, according to Philosophic-Aesthetic Analysis, in my view, is as follows:** i) Relation between art and emotions form an integral feature of aesthetic experience. ii) However, there is a difference between a mere venting out of emotions and of expression of reflected upon/cultivated feelings. iii)These are improvised through creative expressions or imaginative re-constructions.

In the context of Cinema and theory of Aesthetic Judgment based upon Aesthetic Communication leading to Aesthetic delight, Pfleiderer and Lutze's[8] reference becomes pertinent. According to them, 'Cinema is one of the most effective mediums of communication of an art form, yet speech in cinema aesthetics is only one out of several dimensions, and as a rule a particular language plays a subservient role. Most of what the film has to say is to be read/seen as pre-verbal and concrete observations and simple identifications- rather than mere words.' (Pfleiderer and Lutze,1985).

It may be established, therefore, that similar to the art of communicating a story, **Cinema** has become an art of communicating story or depicting the **real life through reel life.** The paper has undertaken this Philosophical Analysis by inter-facing it with other areas of study and culture -by placing it in the debate between art vs reality and conjoining it with the space given to the **portrayal of women** or gendered representation in Hindi Cinema.

II)
Art, Culture and Cinema: Social-Cultural Reality-Art Interface

Presentation and Re-presentation of Reality in Cinematic Art
Art, in general is a part of culture or a concrete reflection of culture in various public media. In fact, art is component of culture which cannot be isolated from its odd components, viz., the philosophical, religious, scientific, moral and social aspects. Hence, cinema is a good index of culture. While the philosophical-moral aspects are the outcome of the thinking power of humans, art is an expression of his creative power, the activity of thinking culminates in abstract concepts of values, art embodies these values in concrete sensuous forms which are available for aesthetic perception and experience. Together, the abstract concepts and their physical embodiments knit the fabric of culture complementing each other and embellishing human life with new meanings and significance.

It is true that the artist being the most sensitive person reacts strongly to the realities of life and therefore the events in life inspire him to express what he thinks and feels about them in creative manner in the particular medium he handles. But he is also a visionary and can give a glimpse of a better world and set new norms of culture. This kind of mutual give and take is a very interesting factor of the relationship between art and culture. We can illustrate this with the examples from great literary works in India and West; while the Epics, plays and novels, etc., mirror the culture of the contemporary society, they also provide models of an ideal society and establish more refined norms of culture. Translated in visual media like theatre and film, they become more powerful with a potentiality to influence a large number of viewers.

Cinema is a popular media of mass consumption which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values. Cinema is meant and believed to entertain, to take the viewer to a world that is

starkly different from the real one, a world which provides escape from the daily grind of life. Cinema is a popular media of mass consumption which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values. **However, as opposed to the 'Presentational Element' in art, it is 'Re-presentation' that elicits more of aesthetic connect between Cinematic art and its receivers, viz., the audience.** It is probably this lack of idealisation or imaginative re-construction of the givenness of reality in terms of cultural context and traditional legacy that marks the difference between a documentary movie and a feature film. Songs, for instance, form an integral part of full- length films in India films. **My focus, in the present paper, is on the popular movies that have been produced in Hindi Language.** Hindi Cinema thereby can be understood as a distinct genre providing a nuanced identity of the sorts to being Indian-popularity of songs and dance etc.

The paper has used the 'mirror and life analogy'[9] (Jennifer,2011: 8-12) to refer to **real-life presentation and re-presentation in reel-life** through the imaginative re-construction in cinematic art. The focus has been how cinematic art communicates with the given social-cultural reality and the global world-view. Cinema, like most art forms, represents society, and thus, to refer the films as being a popular form of historical discourse or of film-makers being historians wouldn't be out of place. The debate of whether cinema influences our surroundings, or our reality impacts what we see in films has never reached a definitive conclusion and perhaps, like most art, this will be debated for a long time. As a technological art, crucially defined by its capacity for the automatic registration of sights and sounds, it is composed of pieces of the culture it represents. 'In order to recover the full discourse that films advance, therefore, the student of film must be at once a historian and an interpreter of art, able to shift constantly between the objective examination of the context of a film and the subjective immersion in the experience it offers.'[10] (Dudley Andrew, 1985).

Siegfriend Kracauer,[11] a film theorist wrote, critiqued often extensively about the conventions of realism in films as bringing the whole material reality into play. Kracauer, in his writings on realism and cinema holds that films may claim aesthetic validity if they build from their basic properties like photographs, that is, they must record and reveal physical reality as it is. A film is realistic because it correctly reproduces that part of the real world to which it refers. He perceived realism as an extremely important factor in cinema, and hence defined realism through categories, which separated the conventions of cinema into the 'basic' and the 'technical'. (Kracauer, 1960).This implies, to discern and apply realism, a filmmaker must understand the physical reality and the photographic imagery that is being filmed.

From what has been seen from the Hindi cinema in the last few decades, one can say that the film world and the real world often mirror or represent each other. **In my analysis**, and according to the examples of the films that I have taken up for this paper, **the mainstream Hindi Cinema of today Realism or a realistic re-presentation has found a comfortable space.** Realistic cinema believes that cinema portrays reality as it is. In other words, as C. S. Lakshmi points out in her article, 'the cinema of realism claims to tell the audience the truth and how can one question truth'(Lakshmi, 1986). [12] It would be pertinent to deliberate on the portrayal or representation of women in Hindi Cinema to contextualise my point.

III)
Portrayal of Women: Problematising Skewed Gendered Dimensions Specifically in Hindi Cinema

At the outset, I wish to notify that the paper has used examples from movies which have specifically showcased women as the protagonists and have highlighted on the world-view that can provide women the centre space. In the academic and intellectual discourse on Feminism both women and Gender are discussed, and often in an overlapping terminology. My references to Gendered representation draw cues from this overlap.

The iconic lines from Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, 'One is not born, but becomes a woman, and man is the subject and woman, the Other' sums it all about the concept of gender construction.'[13] Likewise, Chris Beasley[1] argues that Gender typically refers to the social process of dividing up people and social practices along the lines of sexual identities by being the dominant 'coverall' study of analysing sexual identities and differences and discussing social relationships within and between groups known as men and women. (Beasley,2005). So, Gender is not simply about what we are as a male or female but also what we are doing in our encounters with one another. It is constructed through performance and interaction between people.

My paper deals with representations of women characters in the mainstream Bollywood movies. It is deemed appropriate to examine this issue because women are a major chunk of the country's population and hence their portrayal on screen is crucial in determining the furtherance of already existing stereotypes in the society. It a undertakes some references from popular films to analyze the process of Stereotyping explicated as the concepts of '**the other**, **lacking in agency and volition, lacking subjectivity'** in Gender, Cinema, Philosophical and Sociological writings of various authors who have argued that the reality in mainstream cinema is largely constructed from the male view point. It can be said that media are crucial in the construction of gender ideologies and in gender socialization, the way we 'look', the agency of an individual or the subjectivity as opposed to objectification. [15] (Ince, 2017:1-7/ 41-43)

Brief References from Feminists Scholars on Concepts of Agency, Look and Subjectivity in Art forms and on Hindi Cinema

According to Gender theorists, women's representation in various art forms, and specifically in films has been through the viewer's gaze. Influenced by factors such as politics, economic structure, and culture, the perception of women by film enthusiasts and the like have helped define boundaries both on-screen and behind the scenes. In his 1972, BBC Series, English art critic and novelist John Berger said, *Ways of Seeing*[16] "*Men act, women appear. Men watch, women watch themselves being watched*", adding to his analysis on the representation of women across media while bringing up the concept of the 'male gaze'. (Berger, 1972).

The concept of Male Gaze was put forth by **Laura Mulvey** in her work 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema' **(1975)**[17] has explained Gaze in terms of:
 (a) "Scopophilia" or sexual pleasure in looking which is enhanced by the very way in which film is viewed-in a dark room with moving images controlled by a projector making it seem like a dream. (b) The gaze in dominant cinema is built upon notions of male/female differences created by a culture. The three 'looks' that derive from this 'gaze' are (i) Gaze within the film text-how men gaze at women (ii)The spectator's gaze that identifies with the male gaze and objectifies the women on the screen (iii) The camera's original 'gaze' that goes into the very act of filming. (Mauvley,1975a: 806-809). Gazes of the male protagonist regulate and limit women's subjectivity and sexuality to an object. 'Men look and women are gazed at'. **(**Mulvey, 1975b:809-810)

Shalini Shaji, a film scholar in her article published in 2017 argued that 'visibility of women in Indian cinema' which implies women's presence behind the screen and the way they are depicted on the screen is negligible in the context of women agency and subjectivity. It is observed that misogyny is perpetuated in Indian cinema and women on-screen are frequently objectified. The film industry in India is not women friendly. (Shaji,2017)[18].

According to Urvashi Butalia, the Indian film industry is regressive in the ideals it upholds and the values it projects, specifically so in case of women's role and identity in cinema. Over   ninety-five percent of Hindi Cinema revolves around men. The storyline of such cinema are men oriented, the central character being a man. The other five per cent with women protagonists are often seen through 'male gaze'. (Butalia, 1984)[19] To analyse the representation of women within power in a patriarchal society like India, it is essential to consider the role of agency in women's lives.

 In relation to the portrayal of women and Cinema, Bechdel Test[20] has been considered an important parameter to assess the merit of a movie on it's approach to a movie. To evaluate women's representation in media, a popular test called the Bechdel test is often used. Also called the Bechdel-Wallace Test, it was created by cartoonist Alison Bechdel based on inputs from Liz Wallace and the writings of Virginia Woolf.

In order that a film can be called Bechdel Test compliant, it must have: a) at least two female characters, b) who have names and speak to one another, c) about anything other than a man.'(Bechdel-test-html)**.** Despite the bar being set so low, so very few movies pass this test. It would help to remember that the Bechdel Test wasn't formulated to discern between feminist and non-feminist films, but only as a litmus test to demonstrate the lack of screen-space allotted to female characters in movies.

Despite the merit of the Bechdel test in providing a baseline to assess frequencies of gendered representations in media, it does not tell us anything about the heterogeneity of women represented therein. With popular Hindi cinema increasingly churning out more diverse plots and complex characters, and audiences rewarding women centric and parallel cinema with their patronage, perhaps it's a good time to refine the metrics and re-define the **Good** cinema which gives adequate representation to people's voices, agency and subjectivity, and can enthuse the audience by narratives that are diverse and inclusive.

My main argument is that while cinema in India is in itself a diverse strand of expression incorporating mainstream cinema, off beat, art/ parallel and middle cinema, there is largely a commercial motive. By and large, the major chunk of *Bollywood* mainstream movies are either totally distanced from the real world view, especially in relation to the portrayal of women. Yet, some among these films, and mostly those belonging to the category of Art/Parallel cinema or the Middle cinema have discerningly tried to engage with a social-cultural issues. (Mishra, V. 2009b: 442-444) The realistic brand of cinema, according to me, has actually tried to make movies that have shown an evolving, open ended and a non-judgemental understanding of women.

The examples of movies that have been used in this paper substantiate my point.
In all the examples of the movies, the endeavour has been to use Philosophic-Aesthetic methodology, the concept of relatability, rasa, disinterestedness etc, and to contextualise this by pointing to the concepts of realism in art(the concept of relatability with the characters or aesthetic communication) and by flagging the concepts of agency, subjectivity, male-gaze etc.in popular-realistic Hindi cinema, and is not restricted to any particular category as just mentioned.

There is a rich strand of regional language cinema in India, which I have not taken up for the present paper.

Following the above, let's now try and analyse how cinema and social realities interface with each other. In a country dominated by skewed sex ratio and with widespread crimes against women, where stalking, judging girls for lifestyle choices have become normalised, it is an obvious fallout that the popular visual representation as in cinema, especially Bollywood one will have the questionable visibility of women.

IV)
Examples of Hindi Movies

Following the above - mentioned sections, I have tried, by taking examples of four movies from 2006-2021(though not in chronological order), to analyse and explain as to how cinema and social realities interface with each other. In a country dominated by skewed sex ratio and with widespread crimes against women, where stalking, judging girls for lifestyle choices have become normalised, it is an obvious fallout that the popular visual representation as in cinema, especially Bollywood one will have the questionable visibility of women.

However, in these examples, women's portrayal is realistic and occupies the main length and breadth of the movie. These movies have been chosen to highlight the art-reality connection and communication, and thereby being good reference cases for relatable lived experiences of women and simultaneously of a gender inclusive world-view. I have also used these movies as relevant examples of Film art that combines both a correct re-presentation of the social-cultural realities, and experiences, and yet present the creative idealisation in the form of characters which elicit non-biased aesthetic judgment and delight.

It may be pertinent to flag that despite the skewed and limited visibility given to women, Hindi cinema has still portrayed the changing faces, roles, and contribution etc of Indian women through the lead characters, through various decades.There have been films like Mother India, Bandini, Sahib, Biwi aur Gulam, Rajnigandha, 36 Chawrangi Lane, Umrao Jaan (the old one) Arth, Damini, etc which stood out as exemplars of movies which have placed women in an appropriate space and given their agency, subjectivity, their experiences a considerable visibility and aesthetic dimension in the sense of eliciting an empathic response from the audience (men and women alike).

In the last one and a half decade, there has been a positive change in the film industry regarding women's inclusiveness. *Provoked, Fashion, Chak de India, Mary Kom, Masan, Kahaani (the 1st part) Queen, English -Vinglish , Mom, Tumhari Sulu, Noor, Dor, Pink, Lipstick under my Burkha, Thappad, Mimi and Paglait* are few other recent films that pay attention to the role of women.

All these movies, new and old have been considered as path breaking ones in terms of being 'women focussed' films. However, women in Indian cinema are seldom portrayed as real human beings, true to themselves. Women are discussed in cinema but these are mostly confined to the larger purpose of social culture or submerged in a larger collective identity.

The movies that I have tried to focus upon have concentrated on portraying issues of personal identity, asserting a choice, women as humans with caprice, fallibilities in place and yet no judgments on a woman's character, and form the central character of the film. More than a mere optical plausibility, these films tried to add a vision/perspective to the realistic portrayal. These films had no melo-dramatic distance between the reel and the real, they had identifiable characterisation of the actors and a story-line that clicked with the viewer simply because of the treatment meted out by the director- **Hence, an aesthetic communication or an aesthetic appraisal could be established.** I have taken some cases specifically to substantiate my points- *Dor, Mimi, Pink* and *Thappad.*

1. *Dor* (A movie by Nagesh Kukunoor,2006)[21]
Summary and analysis of the movie
In the movie, we see a friendship bond getting established between two women blossoming out of grief and pain. Even when they meet at probably the worst phase of their lives, Meera (played by Ayesha Takia) and Zeenat (played by Gul Panag) find peace and comfort in each other. Meera loses her husband (Shankar) to an accident in Saudi Arabia. Following his death, Zeenat's husband (Amir) is wrongfully put behind bars. There is only one way through which Zeenat can manage to save her husband from the death sentence, and that is by convincing Meera to sign a *'maafinama* '(pardon letter).

While Meera feels shattered after discovering the truth about Zeenat, she chooses to save her friendship and forgives her. She doesn't doubt Zeenat's sincerity towards their friendship and rushes barefoot to the railway station to give Zeenat a new chance at life. Despite their disagreements, differences, Meera and Zeenat find solace in each other. Meera and Zeenat have several candid confrontations, and while sharing their real-life ordeals, they strengthen the bond of their friendship. In the end, Meera decides to forgive Zeenat and signs the letter that gives Zeenat her husband back. On the other hand, Zeenat offers Meera a whole new life and helps her break from the shackles of society.

Dor reminds us that the real joy of life lies in enjoying small things together and by mutually reciprocating each **other's personal agency.** Zeenat, Meera, and *Behrupiya* (played by Shreyas Talpade) going out of their way to help each other-literally and figuratively. The camaraderie between the reel characters is so endearing that one wishes to have a similar experience in the real-world**.**

I view Zeenat acting as the **Philosopher-friend** to naïve Meera, and that can be compared with a comprehensive reason for an aesthetic experience drawn from this movie. The movie represents values of compassion and Kindness and importantly these being internalised by ordinary women with modest means of living. Both of them have their vulnerabilities and the picturisation is close to realistic condition of a young widow in Rajasthan dependent on her conservative in-laws for her sustenance in a Rajasthan Village and of a woman seeking pardon for her husband and feeling helpless. The movie doesn't, probably, do well on **Bechdel test but is a relatable saga of a non-sexual bond between two women.**

This movie **feels relatable on another social-cultural reality**- Meera is shown as a staunch Hindu from a traditional Rajasthani family, Zeenat is a Muslim. Since the beginning of their friendship, they have been shown to respect each other's boundaries. While Zeenat is shown as a practical woman who stands for what she believes is right, Meera is poles apart, a submissive woman who has never tried to step out from the boundaries of orthodox rituals. **Despite the stark difference in their realities, they form a bond that, in the end, helps them heal and start a new life.**

2. *Mimi* (2021, Director: Laxman Utrkar)[22]

Summary and analysis of the movie

The film dealt with the topic of commercial surrogacy and the concept of mothering person, and woman's autonomy over her body. It also indicates, though just in the passing about the option of adoption vs surrogacy.

Based on acclaimed Marathi film 'Mala Aai Vhhaychy!' by Samruoddhi Porey, Mimi is skilfully adapted by Laxman Utekar. The movie is a story of a small- town dancer, Mimi (enacted by Kriti Sanon) aspiring to become a successful model in Mumbai, and is promised to realise her dream by becoming a contractual surrogate to an American couple. This contract is facilitated by a cab-driver, Bhanupratap (ably enacted by Pankaj Tripathi). The American couple finds Mimi suitable as a surrogate mother candidate when watching a show where she is giving a dance performance and they tell Bhanu to locate someone as fit as Mimi. Bhanu, on the other hand, offers to persuade Mimi to be the surrogate mother. The couple promises to pay the surrogate a wholesome amount of Rs. 2 millions and half a million Rs to Bhanupratap. When Bhanupratap attempts to persuade Mimi, she becomes furious and slaps him, but she accepts the offer when Bhanupratap promises her that she will be paid a huge amount of money just for bearing the intended couple's kid. She becomes pregnant after the IVF process is successful. In order to stay away from her parents , who have no clue and probably won't even comprehend the reason for their unwed daughter becoming pregnant, she lies to them, claiming that she had been cast in a film and would be required to travel to Mumbai for nine months. Mimi begins to live with her friend Shama, and the American couple asks Bhanu to look after her while they are gone in America. Mimi does well to keep herself safely pregnant and does everything possibly good for the un-born child.

After a few months, John and Summer see Mimi for a normal examination. Unfortunately, they discover that the baby has Down Syndrome. This revelation breaks John and Summer's hearts, and they depart immediately for America, telling Bhanu that they no longer want the baby and advising Mimi to abort it.

Mimi is dismayed when she learns of this, but she rejects the thought of abortion and resolves to carry the baby to term. She then decides to return home, but her parents are stunned to discover that she is pregnant. After, a scene or two of slight agitation, her family despite living in a small town surprisingly take it very sportingly. **The film, in my view combines the imaginative and the real in an interesting way.**

Mimi develops a strong attachment to Raj and decides to put her Bollywood dreams on hold in order to care for him. As Raj grows up in Mimi's home, surrounded by Mimi's parents, Shama and Bhanu remain important figures in his life. Four years later, after watching a video of Mimi and Raj on the internet, John and Summer come to India. They inform her that they have changed their minds about the baby and intend to return to America with Raj.

Mimi confronts Summer, claiming that Raj is now her child and that she will not give custody, but John threatens legal action, claiming that Mimi signed a surrogacy contract and has no legal rights to Raj as long as she was paid for her services. Bhanu and Mimi's parents prepare to go to court, but Mimi opposes this idea and chooses to return Raj to John and Summer so that Raj does not have to deal with the stress of court proceedings. Mimi, Bhanu, and family meet John and Summer on the day of their departure back to America to send Raj off with them, but they are astonished to see John with a child, whom Summer claims is their adopted daughter.The couple stumbled across an orphanage on their way back from Mimi's house and felt a connection with Tara, so they chose to adopt her. Summer describes how she discovered that parenthood has nothing to do with blood and everything to do with love and care after seeing Mimi with Raj. They leave Raj with Mimi and her family, knowing that he is her son and belongs with her in every way.

In my analysis, the movie 'Mimi' is an example for all stereotypical individuals who believe surrogacy is unethical and humiliating; and makes a huge fuss about adoption. It deals with **ethical issues about commercial contract with a surrogate** and her **emotional relationship**. The film dealt with the topic of commercial surrogacy and the concept of

mothering person. It also indicates the autonomy of making a choice by **not choosing abortion** and, just in passing, about the option of **adoption vs surrogacy.** The movie, though in a flimsy way reflects on the selfish take of the intended parents on learning about the pathology that their potential child could have and then running away from there. All these issues presented in the reel had a semblance with the real- life issues happening around us. **Hence, the Aesthetic Communication between the reel and real is clearly visible in this example.**

3. *Pink* (2016, Directed by Aniruddha Chowdhury)[23]

Summary and Analysis of the movie

Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury's 'Pink' contextualises the aspect of **consent in intimate relationships as its central theme.**

Summary and Analysis

Minal (Taapsee Pannu), Falak (Kirti Kulhari) and Andrea , three independent women who share an apartment get into a legal battle with powerful and privileged boys. The girls after attending a rock show go for a party at a resort with male friends who met them at the show through a common friend Vishwa where Rajveer tries to get cosy with Minal following which she breaks a bottle on his face badly damaging his eye. Girls are then constantly threatened by Rajveer 's cousin Ankit as they want to seek revenge, The trio doesn't give up and they are ready to face Rajveer and his men. However, Meenal is soon arrested for attacking Rajveer and no lawyer wants to fight their case as Rajveer is a son of politician until their neighbour Deepak Sehgal (enacted by the mega star, Amitabh Bachchan) , suffering from a bi-polar disorder and has quit his practice, decides to defend them. (Summary, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5571734/plotsummary).

This is one of those hard-hitting films which talks about the *'character assassination'* every woman undergoes because she chooses to take charge of her life, and determines its course on her own terms. The film actively questions the pre-conceived notions held by the society with respect to independent women, the type of clothes they wear and the number of men they befriend or choose to sleep with. The film quite effectively deals with the theme of consent, and specifically, sexual consent. A resounding point that the film means to convey is straight-forward and simple – **that a NO is a sentence in itself and it needs no further explanations.**

This movie has touched upon the widespread misogyny and is a subtle sledge hammering of what *needs* to be done in a society choked with prejudices, widespread and outright injustice.

In my view, not only does the movie deals with a lot of important issues, but also somewhere breaks conventions and reinforcements of a mainstream movie by featuring the Mega star. **However, I strongly feel that** It might have been better if instead of Amitabh Bachchan's character, a woman lawyer could have been used.

I have found this movie as a good example of Art- Reality interface since it aesthetically recreates the gender and class privilege and power politics in our society. The powerful statement in the movie, 'No means No' has become a focus of the legal and cultural meaning(s) of Consent of a woman in going further with an intimate relationship.

4. *Thappad* (Directed by Anubhav Sinha**,**2020)[24]

Thappad tells the story of Amrita (role played by Taapsee Pannu) and Vikram (Pavail Gulati), a married couple living in upscale Delhi, with Vikram's mother. Amrita is an efficient homemaker, who is very happy with her life and loves her ambitious, loving husband. Everything is picture perfect until that one moment when, in a fit of rage, Vikram slaps Amrita. For the remainder of the two hours, the audience is shown how we — women, men, rich people, poor people, Indians — how we all react when we see violence we know is wrong. Written by Sinha and Mrunmayee Lagoo, the film does a genius job of explaining the silent suffering of women in a way that even men can understand. It takes this seemingly simple incident and lays bare the complex system of patriarchy, misogyny and violence that support it.

More than anything, however, *Thappad* is the story of all Indian women and their silent suffering, which seems to be inbuilt. The film focuses on Amrita, but also juxtaposes her story with those of the women around her. The domestic help, Sunita, who is beaten up every day by her drunk husband; Amrita's hot-shot lawyer, who is trapped in an unhappy marriage with a pompous, patronising man; Amrita's mother and mother-in-law — women who never had an avenue to even question anything done to them.

The film **resonates the lived experience** of so many women and hence elicits aesthetic response. It feels real because dialogues are simple and not dramatic, and that made the film a stark, powerful mirror to society. Also, in the **current situation of recurring 'lockdowns' and 'work from home conditions', the movie can be contextualised as an example of art-reality interface since, unfortunately, the domestic abuse cases have risen**. Films like *Thappad* are indeed a commentary on such unhappy circumstances.

Conclusion

My contention is despite being such powerful tool and having a massive outreach, cinema, especially Hindi/Bollywood films have contributed minimally in alleviating social-cultural maladies like especially misogyny, unrealistic portrayal of women and giving no subjective agency to women. The tragic part of this medium is that, being a commercial venture, it has to choose between monetary gains and protecting moral. and social. idealism: it has to make all kinds of compromises for the box-office success and forget all other purposes or forego the commercial profits for the sake of

idealistic propositions. But we do come across some films which can realise both the ends even though very rarely. The Film industry needs to be a women-friendly one and encouraging more women to work in the field can be justified, given the minimum attendance of women in film making. Steps such as bringing film industry under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 , rectifying the imbalances in the pay and service conditions in the film industry, encouraging those films that uphold gender equality by instituting special awards and ensuring representation from women's organizations in film industry in discussions related to films would be some ventures that would pave way for an increased involvement of women in film industry and making the industry a women friendly one. Measures should be taken that films are screened through gender tests before they are released. This would keep films from being gender biased. Studies are ought to be conducted in relation to the concerns regarding biased depiction of women in cinema and minimal involvement of them in films.

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