

Subordination of Womanhood in the Cinema *Kakparsh*

Manish S. Gomase,

Research Scholar, SRTMU, Nanded

Cinema mirrors social, political, economical and historical circumstances in society. *Kakparsh* is an Indian Marathi cinema in 2012 based on a short story *Kakparsh* written by Usha Datar. It is directed by Mahesh Manjrekar and produced by Aniruddha Deshpande and Medha Manjrekar, reflecting the pre and post independent society in Maharashtra with customs, traditions, rites and rituals. The culture embodies certain ideologies that function to produce and perpetuate hierarchy of gender; it favors the male section and renounces the female section. The former explicitly hegemonizes the later in every sphere of life, featuring patriarchal nature of society. In this respect Kate Millet articulates, 'Patriarchal society works to inculcate male supremacy through a variety of covert means: politically, women have negligible representation, the biological sciences legitimize chauvinistic beliefs in female inferiority, and social systems-particularly the family-entrench political and social inequality in the private sphere.' (Wagh,326) She gets the treatment of the other and her subordination occurs. Similar state of women characters is depicted in the cinema. The plot largely revolves around the central woman protagonist Uma (role performed by Priya Bapat) and the central male protagonist Hari (role performed by Sachin Khedekar) stating a saga of woman from her marriage to death; it is interwoven with family members entangled in traditions and customs observed in the contemporary society.

The cinema employs a narrative technique with flash back memory to unravel the plot. It does not have a smooth course rather it progresses in to and fro manner that makes the cinema complex to attain its meaning. It begins with a ritual of *pinddan* performed after death of Mahadev (role performed by Abhijit Kelkar), young and recently married lad of Damle family. A crowd did not touch the offerings initially; Hari takes a vow 'Uma will be his throughout life, no one will touch her.' and the

offerings are taken. They return to home in mournful state.

Actually, a sequence of events begins near about 20-25 years ago from narration point of time when a marriage negotiation is brought to Mahadev. Along with Mahadev, Hari, head of the family and Balwant (role performed by Sanjay Khapre), his friend go to see a girl named Durga (role performed by Ketaki Malegaonkar), Uma's name before marriage. In Durga's home, their meet, dialogue, information about girl, her interrogation, her knowledge about household things, her interest and approval are traditionally observed. The girl and her family remain mute mostly, she is expected to reply to the questions of the guests and supposed not to counter question them. If it happens, one is reprimanded. When Durga asks, 'Can Hari play a music box?', she is reprimanded by the parents. They are not traditionally assigned to make themselves free of verbosity and behavior like the guests. They are only recipient and respondent. She sings Bahinabai's song in response to an appeal of Hari 'are sansar sansar jasa tava chulhyawar aadhi hatala chatke mag bhajte bhakar' presents an essence of woman's life in the world. She bears lot to run the course of her life whether it is family or society, she has to win its heart, repressing and breaking her own heart and showing generosity to the others. This casts a strong patriarchal clutch on the events in which girl's side has no concrete significance, it is 'the other'; whereas boy's side is bestowed favor traditionally, it is 'the self' that questions to her 'I', attempting to discard her existence. Here Rubin reiterates sexism in society, 'the sex/gender system is a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity.' Girls' child marriage practice existed in the upper caste Brahmin also in spite of introduction of the Act regarding prohibition of child marriage is visible in Mahadev and Durga, pre-pubescent girl marriage. As soon as she receives the cycle, the consummation of

the marriage is designed by astrology and it is performed. In the same night, he dies due illness without beginning marital life. Both the marriage and the consummation of the marriage are linked with astrology which is plainly associated with religion, an ideological institution in society. These are controlled by religion that makes the human beings less important. They are marginalized and persuaded to think and act as told in it showing fear to take place something wrong if it is not rightly emulated. Every religious ritual is strictly followed regardless of their consequences. It is because of brainless observation of date suggested after reading astrology takes life of Uma's husband Mahadev. Religion functions like opium pill in the life of these personages more prominently women who reckless think and behave coming under its influence and pay heavily; however they seek themselves in happy state just because of their false consciousness. Quoting from the Mahabharata 'puranam manvo dharmah sango vedoshi chikitsitam agasidhani chatvari na hantavyani hetubhih.' Dr. B. R. Ambedkar articulates being a part of Hindu religion, 'A Hindu is not free to use his reasoning faculty.' (Ambedkar, 24) certainly speaks about rendering privilege to religion rather human beings' existence. In addition to this, Durga, newly married girl is renamed as Uma. Actually, an individual's identity lies in his/her name and when it is changed only as a part of tradition it raises a question on one's being in the world. It abolishes an identity of personage. Uma's renaming is an obvious attempt to reject her earlier identity in society that is a consequence of the relatives' prior experiences, assumptions, expectations and belief closely associated with patriarchal linguistic power structure. Michel Foucault illustrates, 'Language is at the centre of social power and social practices.' (Berterns, 157) She is doubly subordinated in this context.

She does not have her own representation in marriage, she is only daughter of parents and bridegroom of groom. She is decorated with flowers, mangalsutra, kumkum and saree to look beautiful but her delight is again her false consciousness. Looking beautiful is always indulgence. Fundamentally, Foucault analyzes that body is a 'political entity' and so her body is defined roles and functions. It becomes an instrument of work. She is expected to

marry and bear child to run a home of man called husband and to get social and economical security rather it binds her to domesticity. She becomes an object of a misogynistic ideology who fulfills masculine expectations rather than rendering respected position and refraining her from daily anxieties, worries and agonies. In this regard Simone de Beauvoir asserts, 'Marriage is an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement, which reinforces sexual inequality and binds women to domesticity.' (Wagh,321) She has rightly identified the hidden patriarchal practices in marriage system which are also opaque in the marriage of Uma and Mahadev. The former is attempted to coarsely bring into the act of marital sex is a notable aspect. This does not take virtually, it is sister-in-law who persuades man called brother-in-law not to have conjugal relationship before her puberty. Here feminine urge to stand by the side of woman understanding the physiology is seen, otherwise like the public life, the private life is also tamed by man.

Mahadev's death brings drastic changes in Uma's life. She, who belongs to Brahmin caste, becomes a widow in young age. Widowhood is curse in any society; the Brahmin caste is no more exception to it. All the norms of beauty are not assumed to be followed by her, in other words, she should not look beautiful. She should forsake everything that makes her physique charming and spells men. She is supposed to wear white clothes and bangles, to put black speck on forehead and not to wear any precious ornament. Along with these, she is not allowed to participate in any religious activity and auspicious occasion and more poignant to it is she is prohibited to cross the threshold of home and to communicate the outsides. She does not undergo the ritual of *keshwapan*; she can save herself from it only because of Hari's denial and prohibition to perform the unnecessary rituals told in so called religious traditions. Actually, it is not he but his promise at the time of *pinddan* restricts him to allow executing the rituals generally performed after widowhood. It is his misogynistic promise obliges him to act upon. But Namu aatya as widow underwent all rituals that torture, humiliate and agonize to her throughout life. She also tries to convince her that it is a part of woman's life and no one can refrain own self from it under such

circumstances. She seems to be completely socialized and normalized in patriarchal practices to make widow ugly in appearance. In this regard Louise Althusser rightly opines, 'The subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system.' (Berterns, 85) This produces mystique vacuum before her and fetches her to complex state of mind. The complexity and exclusion denies her to know more, do more and have more. It leads her to dependency and false liberty. She fails to maintain her existence happily and peacefully in rigid constraints of masculinity.

Widowhood of Uma makes her target of various vicious circles. Like female protagonist Rama in Satish Alekar's *The Dread Departure*, she is looked as an object of sex to pacify carnal desire of the males though a woman never wants to serve as so in real life. As soon as Upadhyay (role performed by Vaibhav Mangle) and the villagers seek an opportunity to fulfill their desire and take a revenge in the Damle's critical condition, they attempt though Balwant and his mates save her from physical exploitation and beating. The villagers sexual neurosis is rightly cast with Miller's Sexus— 'You never wear any undies do you? You're a slut, do you know it? I pulled her dressup and made her sit that way while I finished my coffee.

'Play with it a bit while I finish this.'

'You're filthy,' she said, but she did as I told her.

'Take your two fingers and open it up. I like the colour of it.'

...With this I reached for a candle on the dresser of my side I handed it for me.

'Let's see if you can get it in all the way...'

'You can make me do anything, you dirty devil.'

'You like it, don't you?' (Miller, 181-182)

They want to exploit her physically for she is 'the other' even in institution of family that makes them easy to objectify and seduce her if a woman or her family does not follow the so called social norms. She becomes a victim of males' lechery and vindication.

The Damle family is traditional. The head of the family is man—Hari who runs the course of outside and inside. He has a complete tame over the members. The women follow him without grudge. Tara is a traditional wife, she finds her happiness in following husband's inclination and family's

welfare. Being an entity wholly socialized and naturalized in andro-centrism, Namu *aayya* plays a role of dogmatic emulator of customs and traditions with her vexation, sorrow and anguish of widowhood and Uma is young widow with to and fro mindset about life, family and relationship. Women members have negligible importance in decision making. Their role is limited to hearth, children nourishment and relation making and maintaining. Freedom to talk, speculate, express and act is forlorn aspect. They constitute an expression of family consciousness, resonating in complex ways to feel family and social needs and aspirations. This schooling is done scrupulously to limit them to the family affairs. It makes them the sparrows caged in family system in which they are just supposed and institutionalized to cease themselves to the periphery of familial bondages. In this regard Louise Althusser writes, 'Family is an ideological apparatus.' (Madge, 66) It means like other ideological apparatuses, institution of family also functions to marginalize, subjugate and objectify women. No female character is ever seen crossing the limits of patriarchal norms. Their thinking and behavior is shaped that is appropriate to the set structure of society. Hence, these women are the primary oppressed group virtually existing in every known family; their oppression is most widespread and it is quantitatively and qualitatively high yet it goes unrecognized because of the sexist production of the oppressors and the oppressed individuals in family.

Tara's suffering and death brings changes in the roles of family members especially Uma's role. She is grown up woman now who takes a responsibility of domestic affairs and cares family members. She frequently comes into the contact with Hari. As a young woman, she naturally gets attracted towards him. He supports and saves her from the evils in society. It germinates respect in her mind and stretches it to attraction and love for him. She cannot open her heart to him as a widow of his younger brother. She is in state of dilemma like Hamlet who spends his hours in speculation of what to do and what is not, what right and what is wrong. Meanwhile, she is caught to hear and watch physical relation of newly married couple by Hari. Disgusted with her behavior, he stops talking to her. Here, misogynistic ideology questions woman's attitude

towards sexuality. She has to maintain decency and distance from sexual behavior and speech; it should not be explicit in public. Her sexual display in the public and the private can bring disgrace to family. It is a male-oriented phenomenon, so it dishonors the men in family. She should be well mannered in the public and the private life. The violation of set standards ostracizes her; it is seen in Uma's episode. It produces guilt consciousness in her mind and has to suppress the feelings of love arousing for him. The burden of guilt, separation and mutilation isolates her from family. It makes her condition extremely pathetic and miserable. Perhaps, she utters the words of Barve, Alekar's character in *Begum Barve*:

Mercy, help me, The lord is angry with me, The only support of my life, Where has he too vanished?
(Alekar, 346)

They never endeavor to reach each other to communicate is a reason of serious break down of communicate required in the situation, she ponders about his happiness, peace and tranquility at the expense of her speechlessness; whereas he enacts as an agent of patriarchy to avoid her because of her so called mistake. This mechanism substantially contributes to her alienation. In this respect Max Lewis Edward Andrew state, 'Man exists in a state of alienation.' It is an absurd germinated with meaningless and purposeless thinking which has no value in real sense.

Sex is a natural instinct in every human being. She is a young widow, she naturally has bodily desire. Her sexual urge is shown through her attraction towards Hari, throwing cold water on own body and peeping into the room of newly married couple. But sex is andro-centric aspect and body is a 'political entity'. His sexuality is related to power and orgasm whereas her sexuality is reciprocal and intimate. For Tong, 'Sexuality and gender are the products of the same oppressive social practices; there is no difference between gender discrimination against women in the boardroom and sexual objectification in the bedroom' (Tong, 68) that explicitly demonstrate man's claim and control over woman sexuality. She has no right to express her sexuality, to voice out her displeasure or to fulfill her desire outside of marriage system; so she has to suppress it. V. Geetha demonstrates in this respect, 'She has to live with the burden of a bound

sexuality.' (Geetha, 121) It is the primary locus of male power in which woman harming gender relations are constructed.

Culture dictates woman self-penetration and self-sacrifice without too much care of own physique and psyche. She is expected to think about the others first upon all. If she does not get anything, she should not raise voice against it instead, she should bear. Hari is without words with her that disturbs her severely. She goes on fast and ceases to communicate the family. It profoundly affects her health psychologically and physically. She becomes bed ridden and sacrifices everything, only expecting Hari to communicate her and to marry her. It elucidates that she victimizes own self only for the sake of her love without expressing her grudge or behaving in negative sense. She is just scapegoat of the misogynistic periphery around her. She seeks herself in difficult situation to explore and analyze it properly; she adopts the way to live life in negative angel that hurts own self and does nothing else. Spivok pens, 'In the context of colonial production, subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.' (Berterns, 212) The only outcome of her self-penetration is Hari gets ready to marry her; however she meets to her catastrophic end even before fulfillment of her intention of getting engaged in marriage with him. What is expected result of patriarchy in association with the life of subaltern, it occurs with her. She does not raise finger on irrational and illogical aspects, she adopts it mutely that also functions against her, evacuating her earthly existence. She could have imparted connotation to her life if she had endeavored. But being trapped and unable to decode and explore social structure, she fails to seek any value and meaning in purposeless, meaningless and absurd world. In Alekar's *Begum Barve*, womanhood is nicely portrayed with symbol of incense stick as:

'The poor thing will burn away in style. With nary a whine nor a whimper.

No protest, no complaint. It will quietly burn away, to make the home cosy with its fragment ash...' (Alekar, 305)

To conclude, the cinema represents that the definitive reality of womanhood is to undergo humiliation, torture, subordination and self-sacrifice,

resulting in pain, sorrow and despair. In fact, family and society run on two wheels man and woman. She cares for all members of family and plays roles such as daughter, mother, wife and nurse. She works in home without any expectation and tries to bring peace, tranquility and happiness in the others' lives. However patriarchal structure of society makes man 'primary' and woman 'secondary'. She does not get equal position, status and respect rather she is marginalized and subordinated that makes her life dowdy, monotonous, dependent and unsecured. She makes self-sacrifice for family like incense stick which squanders perfumes and burns itself; she is excluded and discarded from every male centric domain and is obliged to live dried life. Even her self-sacrifice is taken for granted and so her womanhood is only matter of subordination and objectification. It is the phallus-centric ideology that differentiates the two and endeavors to form, percolate and persist hegemony of man over woman; otherwise there is no distinction between both sexes expect biological difference.

References:

1. Ambedkar B. R. (2007). Annihilation of Caste. New Delhi. Critical Quest.
2. Alekar Satish (2010). Begum Barve In Collected Plays of Satish Alekar. New Delhi. Oxford Univdrsrty Press.
3. Bertens Hans (1998). Literary Theory. London. Routledge.
4. Geetha V. (2009). Gender. Stree. Kolkata
5. Kakparsh cinema (2012). Scripted by Usha Dattar. Directed by Mahesh Manjrekar. Produced by Aniruddha Deshpande and Medha Manjrekar.
6. Miller Henry (1965). Sexus. New York. Grove Press.
7. Pandit Maya. (2009). Representation of Family in Tendulkar, Elkunchwar and Dalvi's Plays: An Anthology of Recent Criticism. Ed. by V. M. Madge. New Delhi. Pencraft International.
8. Tong Rosemarie (2009). Feminist Thought. Third Edition. Colorado. Westview Press.
9. Wagh Patrica (2006). Literary Theory and Criticism, New York. Oxford University Press.

