

Research Article

Giving Voice to Woman's (a)Sexuality: Cinema of Kalpana Lajmi

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ABSTRACT

In the craft of Kalpana Lajmi, the journey of a woman is from body to soul. Her capturing of female sexuality, its desires and assertions to bodily and emotional needs was a step ahead to contemporary cinema and times. She questioned the binary sexual norms prevalent in the society and gave voice to retaliate and reject. Her portrayal of a Woman as a protagonist is someone who is unapologetic about her desires, relations and actions. Sexuality (Woman) lense in her camera travelled inside the body of a village woman to an urban damsel and touched the core (soul). A woman's narration to the story and script was a big risk in patriarchal socialization as the sexual dilemmas, dreams and desires of the woman's body are excluded while defining her. This article is an attempt to analyse and present the woman as an independent (a)sexual being in different contexts. For the analysis five Hindi movies (*Ek Pal*, *Rudaali*, *Darmiyaan*, *Daman* and *Chingaari*) are chosen which cover the wide socio-cultural and sexual spectrum.

Keywords: (a)sexuality, Sexual dilemmas, Sexuality lense

INTRODUCTION

... I feel women are such a minority in this country.
– (Lajmi in an interview with rediff.com/movies/2000).

Kalpana Lajmi is known for raising women-oriented issues with a realistic background in her cinema. In the year 1986, she came out with film 'Ek Pal' (A Moment). Lajmi not only produced but also, did the script and screen play writing which was highly

appreciated by the audience and critics. In her journey of 20 years from 1986 to 2006 she travelled with wide variety of topics, from women issues of identity struggles to questioning socio-economic and political practices. Three of her masterpieces (Rudaali, Darmiyaan and Daman) received National Film Awards for best performances (woman as protagonist). The film Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence was distributed by the Government of India for the mass reach and also well taken by the viewers and critics.

Lajmi used this popular medium as a powerful and effective tool to voice and challenge the societal structures and norms and woman positioning into it. She drives us to her narrated world and its reality. *She is indeed Salman Rushdie of the celluloid* (Indianetzone.com, 2014). At the age of 32, Lajmi directed her first full length Hindi film, which contains a complex, controversial, distasteful, bold and offensive portrayal (which many people would think) of woman i.e. woman with sexual liberty and choices. In an interview with Sharmila Taliculam (film critic), Lajmi said,

“Ek Pal, my first film, dealt with a woman's desire to express herself sexually. A woman who does not regret having had an affair. Who does not believe in the concept of sin, who feels that if she has made a mistake, would face the consequences with courage and not escape from them. It was a very delicate subject and much ahead of its time, played wonderfully by Shabana Azmi” (Talking Sexuality, 2000).

Film is not only a conception of director but is a collaborative creation, where the characters played by the actors are very important. If they are able to deliver the story to the audience, the way it was crafted by the people behind the camera, it would serve its purpose and leave an impact. They are the carriers of the messages to the masses. Selection of cast had always remained crucial for Lajmi as she touched upon bold issues and wanted to have a strong representation. She further added in her interview that, *“Being an intellectually vibrant person and a fine actress, Shabana gave the role the correct tone and shade. So Ek Pal came across as a very sincere film. It didn't strike a false note anywhere and that's definitely due to her performance”* (Talking Sexuality, 2000).

Film is adapted from a short story written by Maitreyee Devi and set up in 80s where characters belonged to high class families. Women were educated and somewhat taking charge of their lives and decisions. Situated background (North East India) reflects the modern life styles. Priyam is independent in her relationship and comfortably able to talk about it with her parents which generally not seen in Indian households. She is explicit about her relation with the boyfriend and set the boundaries on her own without regrets and remorse. Later the situation becomes such that she had to

marry the boy suggested by her parents. Not finding the boyfriend committed to this relation, she decides to go ahead with this alliance. Wealth could bring convenience to life but not to heart. A fun loving Priyam had shown to be living with her loneliness and struggling with the poor health (physical and mental both). Her husband is rich businessmen who keeps preoccupied with his business meetings and trips and unlike the unmarried Priyam, she confined herself in her big lavish house. The situation becomes worse by her inability to conceive following a miscarriage. If we measure success of marriage in terms of materials, comforts and money then yes, it was a successful one. But if we understand marriage as physical/sexual and emotional alliance of two individuals and measure it in terms of interpersonal relations, emotional and sexual compatibility /gratification then her loneliness speaks all.

But how a vivacious woman who had her own will and wish, transformed in to docile and depressed soul explains the burden of expectations from a marriage and a married woman. Priyam becomes a woman who is searching herself but trapped with certain dilemmas. A sexually expressive Priyam couldn't resist herself when she meets her lover (pre marriage boyfriend) again. Incompleteness in her nuptial, drives her to the world of desires and fantasies again. (A)sexual¹ soul travels to the past and felt aroused. A "married" Priyam steps ahead to have a sexual fling² with her ex-boyfriend. She is clear that she cannot expect any commitment from him and neither she would be able to commit. Her suppressed desires and dreams pushed her back to the relation which betrayed her when she was expecting a commitment. Took her existence in her own hands without caring for the consequences that is what unmarried Priyam was; No regrets, no remorse. Her relation with the boyfriend culminated in pregnancy. Despite the scandalous series of scenes, she takes a sole decision to carry the child. Her boyfriend protests but she is determined to keep the baby. It is her choice to remain pregnant. Priyam has shown different shades of a woman who is mulled in love, emotions, honour and shame and decides to go with her heart. A stirred portrayal of woman who is full of life but stifled in mundane of discontented marriage is a masterpiece of Lajmi's creativity.

Another milestone directorial work of hers, *Rudaali* (1993), is based on a short story by the same name written by Mahashweta Devi (in Bangla). *Rudaali* are women of

¹Without sexual feelings or associations, "asexual individuals may still experience attraction but this attraction doesn't need to be realized in any sexual manner". They may fall in love with someone but not sexually involve. These dictionary explanations aptly apply on Indian married women, who are taught to be sexually submissive and many are passive and do not reveal whether they are sexually excited or aroused.

²A fling is a casual (non-committal) relationship, involves a sexual or nearly sexual relationship without any /necessary expectations of commitment normally present in a formal romantic relationship.

a low caste in Northern India (particularly in the state of Rajasthan) who perform mourning dances and songs at the funerals of higher caste men (Hurlstone, 2011:10). This film is about a woman 'Sanichari' (played by Dimple Kapadia), who belongs to the impoverished lot of the village. She is abandoned by her mother because her father dies soon after her birth. She brings bad omen to the family that is why her name is kept on God 'Shani Dev' (who was cursed by his mother). Her name is an embodiment of the day she was born, Saturday (considered inauspicious). By virtue of being a woman, she is won by her husband in a gambling game, who was a bonded labour for a landlord. She has a miserable life: drunkard husband who has little to spare for the family needs; ailing mother-in law and little child to be looked after. As the story progresses, she loses her mother-in-law and husband and the grown-up son runs away. Sanichari's daughter-in-law in the film is from the prostitute colony who is brought home, by her son. She has a dispute with her. Daughter-in-law leaves the house and son too. An all alone woman with no emotional catharsis, she is the 'dry' Sanichari. People are surprised by her inability to cry. She mentions that there was no time for her to cry on any of the 'misfortunes' suffered by her. She has to carry on with her daily routine and do what has to be done. Sanichari is a clear violation to the patriarchal diktat and does not cry at the demise of her husband.

She develops an emotional bond with a professional mourner (rudaali). At the end, she, as well as the audience, learn that the rudaali was indeed the mother who had abandoned her as a child. This news works as the shocking trigger to burst Sanichari's pent up emotions. She cries for the first time in her life and becomes a *rudaali*. It is a journey of a woman to explore the *self*.

Lajmi's narration is not only limited to class and social hierarchies but has a feminist twist. For Mahashweta Devi, ... *it is a tale written by a writer irrespective of gender, about people's struggle and their confrontation with the system* (Katyal, 2010:20-21). But Usha Ganguly who wrote *Rudaali* (adopted the story in Hindi play), found the scope in the story, to paint it in feminist colours apart from the social and class dynamics in play.

..., I strongly believe that Rudaali is a women's text. I believe that the Indian woman, whether it's Sanichari or someone from the middle or upper class, is highly exploited in our society. Somehow, in Rudaali, I see Sanichari protesting against society on the whole (Ganguly in Katyal, 2010:36).

Rich women of economic and social influence have all luxuries within the four walls of *Havelis*. On the other hand, women like Sanichari are free to move anywhere. It is a post-independence set up when the movements for social equality were in action. Though Lakshman Singh, the landlord, publicly supports this, he himself has many

bonded labours. Sanichari's husband was one among them. His desire to own Sanichari is a depiction of the feudal tradition that he is ingrained into. Sanichari is skeptical and scared of the advances. Though some attraction is apparent from the screenplay (Das and Nath, 2014), but there is no direct depiction. The body language of both, towards each other, can be taken as a cue.

There is no explicit evidence to show any physical liaison between them. The ambiguity and uncertainty in their relationship is depicted throughout the narration. Caste and Class barrier could be one of the prominent factors which worked silently to maintain that hesitance and distance. There are songs which not only describe the dilemma and emotions of Sanichari but also somewhere the same emotions of Lakshman Singh by presenting him behind the shadows. One side his body language expresses his non commitment to her but on the other side appointing her as a special maid (care taker) to his wife gives a sense of his desire to see her around. And on the other way round Sanichari who is portrayed as stoical to any such advances shown by lala³ and pandit⁴ and her entire body language resist to become a subject of desire but got agreed to work in haveli. It can be explained that due to miserable financial conditions she did not turn down the proposal or could be her desire for Lakshman Singh. As an object of desire Sanichari is also an object of gaze for Lakshman Singh.

Her social status places her in the last pedestal (low caste/Dalit) as per the caste hierarchy which does not allow her to look in to the eyes of a feudal lord of high cast but it doesn't stop the lord to have a gaze on her. There encounters apparently show the sexual dilemma and tension. Whenever there is a reference of Lakshman Singh or someone in the village talks about him, her glance and gestures speak her feelings. The camera can not only produce screen images but also spaces beyond (Mulvey, 1975: 841).

Darmiyaan (1997) (in between) is not only a path-breaking story but also a brave and honest effort of Lajmi to touch upon a silent issue so sensitively. It is based upon the relationship of a mother Zeenat (Kiron Kher) and her eunuch child Mazhuddin alias 'Emmi' (Arif Zakaria). The movie is set in 1940s, where Zeenat is an actress in Bollywood. Life is full of all the luxuries and comforts that she could possibly want in life. But there is a major setback when she finds that her son is a eunuch (Hijra⁵). Zeenat is not able to accept that Emmi is her son and thus refers to him as her younger brother.

³A person who runs a grocery and other goods store. Poor people borrow money and goods from him. Term used in North India.

⁴priest

⁵Hijra is an umbrella term for Eunuchs, Intersex and Transgender people (Reddy, 2006), often used in North Indian states.

She is shattered and neglects him until her mother steps in and adopts the child. In due course, her strong position along with her lover is taken away by an upcoming actress. Unable to cope with the failure in her personal and professional life, she pushes herself to alcoholism and ruined her wealth in gamble. In the state of mental depression, she becomes insecure and agitated and begins to avoid and reject people who love and care her. She is scared. Her son gets all the love and care which he⁶ needs, from his grandmother. Meanwhile, he tries to console his troubled mother and help her out in all possible ways.

Unfortunately, due to rejection from mother and a threat from hijra community, Emmi joins their community. There is a transformation in his attire and body language which reflects the fluid sexuality and also his dilemma to understand his self. Emmi gets raped, completely shattered, decides to go back to his earlier life. While running away he finds an abandoned child on the road and takes him along. He wanted to look after and raise the child but his own sexual identity keeps him in dilemma as society will never accept him as father. He decides to be with his mother to give her support and care. This film is a statement about a eunuch's internal anguish. In one of her interviews Lajmi says:

"Darmiyaan wasn't totally a women-oriented film. It was about why world heaps and ostracises anyone or anybody who deviates from the norm. Though not overtly women-oriented, it did deal with the feminine psyche... Trapped feminism" (Talking Sexuality, 2000).

As Judith Butler says, it is by disobeying the rigidity of gender norms that it can be challenged (1999: viii). The transgender population thus provides natural resistance to the gender stereotypes and Lajmi speaks for the marginalized gender of the society. The son in the film struggles for recognition and denies to be typecast in a specific role, and maintains his individual identity by neither being a part of the hijra community nor conforming to the standards of gender roles. Darmiyyaan questions society for the gender binaries. Emmi in the film is a question and a challenge to the rigid gender definitions that one is supposed to adhere to.

Emmi is shown fascinated towards her mother's fancy ornaments and make- ups and tries to imitate her style and mannerism. It is apparent from the childhood that he was inclined to feminine part of him. He likes to apply lipstick and make up wherein he was always shown in boys' attire, though Zeenat did not disclose about the Emmi to the whole world. There is an incident when child Emmi was playing with other boys at the sea shore. One of the children gave a proposal (a bet) on the

⁶Zeenat treats him as her son and pronoun he is used for Emmi throughout.

child who will pee the farthest. While all the boys were in action, they were astonished to see Emmi sitting. They teased and ridiculed him by making fun out of him. They repeatedly questioned him whether he is a girl. And noticed that he doesn't have penis. That mockery haunted Emmi and he questioned his grandmother, where is his penis? He asked for it. She tries to pacify and console him but he keeps on crying and demanding for it. Ambiguity of sexual and gender identity was so well captured by Lajmi in the character of Emmi. Definitely it's a dilemma for the child to understand his/her self and culminating into a complex self. In Emmi's word, how painful is a eunuch's life? Should have been given away, when I was born. But now I neither belong to your world nor to hijras world. I am stuck in between (Mushtaq and Ahmad, 2019: 184).

He felt left out and same the Zeenat was. To come out from this emotional and physical misery and vulnerability he gives poison to his mother as was unable to stop her from self-damage and to once for all to clear his doubts and dilemmas and have peace, he poisons himself too.

Daman (Oppression) is a story (written by Lajmi) of a battered wife (played by Raveena Tondon), a low caste poor girl Durga, married to a wealthy tea plantation owner. The wife is submissive, silent and subjected to violence at the hands of her sadist and indecent husband. He has adulterous relationships with other women. *His idea of showing his love to his wife is scorching her with hot candle wax, disfiguring her face with lipstick and remorselessly raping her* (Rad, 2016).

Contrary to that, the younger brother of the husband is sober and gentle. He is the only safeguard in many situations, but he is also shown helpless as it is the matter between husband and wife. A covert and silent relationship does build up between Durga and her brother-in-law which is misunderstood by the husband. Giving birth to a girl child is not accepted by the patriarch. Durga keeps on suffering violence almost every day. She wants to give her daughter a safe and secure childhood and dreams to make her an independent individual. The bad tempered, insensitive father decides to marry his adolescent daughter to an old business man. Durga suffers atrocities, violence and humiliation by her husband because she does not have any other place to take resort to. She is completely shattered with this decision and runs away with her daughter. The father, somehow, finds them and tries to lure the daughter. He gets furious, on her rejection and refusal, to accept him as her father (or any sort of alliance) and he tries to kill her. Unlike the mother, the daughter learns through her life experiences and makes her stand clear to her boyfriend. She, too, rebels against the stereotype of the 'good girl' that she is expected to be. Durga

Saikia, is a woman from a poor family and hence, doubly marginalized by virtue of her poverty and her gender.

Daman depicts women's suffering due to male subjugation and domination. The film not only focuses on the dark and hidden side of the institution of marriage and conveys the trauma of a victim of marital rape, but also, brings to light, the oppressive conditions of a married woman's life in an arranged marriage. It does not mean that domestic violence does not take place in love marriages. The film portrays how a woman can be physically, emotionally and sexually exploited by her husband and shows violence as an indicator of social structure while also offering women's agency as a response to domination. Miserable economic conditions of the family sometimes push them sale or marry their daughters to incoherent marriage alliance.

Durga is an example of subaltern sexuality. Her subdued status in the society did not give her courage to come out from this exploitative relation. Her body has shown as the property of her powerful and rich husband. He has complete control over her body and emotions. Durga never tried to protest and accepted as her ill fate, what mostly families tell to their daughters. Her compromise with sexually pervert man (husband) is an evidence of unequal gender relations in society. Her pain is explicit throughout the movie. Her brother- in -law is sympathetic towards her and sometimes it seems it is respect but there is love and admiration too for her in his eyes. Durga gave everything to all the relations to make them congenial. But it was misread by her husband and her image was questioned and self- respect was tarnished with the allegations. Husband, who is exploitative employer with full of lust and exploited many young girls working in the tea garden. He is an example of hard-core patriarch a reflection of hegemonic masculinity and dominant sexuality.

The wife suffers all atrocities but when it comes to the safety of her daughter, the mother becomes the saviour. Killing her husband for a terrified and intimidated wife is not an easy thing, but for a furious mother, who overcomes her fears and inhibitions and does it to be free from the demonized father. In an interview it was asked to Lajmi, why she choose domestic/marital rape as the subject for her latest film, to which she responded:

... middleclass and upper middleclass women, despite being educated are trapped in marriages where they have no equality... subjected to tremendous mental and physical torture by absolute sadists of husbands. Men who...come from equally respectable backgrounds. I wanted to delve into how women feel about being trapped in a situation like this. Why can't they break away and start life afresh? That is what Daman is about. It means domination (Talking Sexuality, 2000).

The film *Chingaari* (Spark), is the story based on a novel 'The Prostitute and the Postman' by Bhupen Hazarika, about the lowly paid female sex worker *Basanti* (Sushmita Sen). It addresses the problems of- women; caste norms; class hierarchy, purity and pollution; Priest as a messenger of God and supreme power; prostitutes as sexually pervert objects- that are still dominant mindsets. The story is set in a village of North India which has the area chalked out for prostitutes called 'lal batti' (Red Light area). Basanti is the most desirable prostitute of the lot. She is the object of lust for the head priest of the village. The priest is the most respectful persona in village hierarchy, nobody dares to question him, but the lustful priest spares nobody not even the prostitutes. Being commercial sex workers, they are assumed to be accessible for sexual pleasure/gratification.

And another character, the young postman reads and writes letter for the illiterate villagers and forthcoming to make their lives better including that of the prostitutes. He falls in love with Basanti. As an anonymous lover he writes letters for her, shows respect towards her. He moreover, expresses his desire to marry her and give her daughter his name. Never having received such pure and clean affection, she falls for him. Basanti, despite being a prostitute, is a woman with feelings and emotions like others. The local priest who also visits Basanti in the dark to satisfy his sexual lust, dislikes the postman's frequent visits, and his friendly behaviour with her. To stop other men from going to Basanti, the priest forbids anyone from going to Lal Batti. Postman loses his life in the process as the priest does not approve this marriage and planned to kill Basanti.

At many instances, Basanti's body language presents an undeclared resistance to the exploitative system sanctioned by the temples and the priests. Due to the socially excluded status in community, she is prohibited from entering the temple and praying to the Goddess 'Kali'. When she finds out that priest is behind the killing of her lover, she takes it on herself to end the priest's reign of terror and people rally behind her. The 'goddess' thus appears in her mortal frame. It conveys a strong message by showing the central character, Basanti a prostitute; the most ignored, disregarded, unacknowledged and marginalised person in the community, comes forward as a rebel against sexual exploitation and kills the religious head of the village.

Basanti's character is carved as a marginalised sexuality. She is sexually humiliated, frightened and controlled by the lord of patriarch (priest). Her love making with priest is the most critical part of Lajmi's narration. It is shown that Basanti tried to form a dialogue with Priest but every time she was ridiculed by him and sexually exploited and raped. She does not have power to say no to the sexual proximity of the supreme authority and she never denied until she found true and pure love in the

eyes of postman. This is the moment when her real (sexual) self begins to emerge. She never found respect in the eyes of males for her. This is purely a matter of soul. She tells to the priest that you touched my body several times, you ruined it as well but you never once able to touch my soul.

Lajmi very effectively was able to make a distinct difference in the sexual soul of Basanti with the Priest and her other clients and when she was with her lover. Her entire body language and her eyes expressing her love and desire for the relation with the postman. The sexual lense of Lajmi worked amazingly in the entire film. Film which has a Prostitute and the Priest in centrality what as per religious scriptures a combination of pollution and purity, the tussle between two has shown with the critical lense. The thoughtful part of the love making from Lajmi's lense was more of the exposure of male body rather showing female/s/prostitutes in skimpy clothes as it is shown generally. The aspect of sexual and desirous man with the eyes of a woman is an out of the mainstream thought.

CONCLUSION

Films taken are rebellious, and ahead the times in their own terms. Characterisation of Priyam, Sanichari, Zeenat, Emmi, Durga and Basanti are the narration of director. In Ek Pal the character of Priyam is all about a woman's sexual expression in/outside marriage. The expression in the form of liberation. Lajmi's Priyam is bold enough to face the consequence of her alliance. She is not in the guilt rather she takes an independent decision to carry with the child. *Rudaali*, a movie, about an oppressed equivocal woman Sanichari, who is perturbed about her origin, existence and identity. A lonely woman, destined for singleness, desire of many, sceptical about her own desires. She is the portrayal of 'conflict within', in search of her mother and her own motherhood. Zeenat in Darmiyaan is a woman who is trapped in her own mind-body dualism. But she does not let the standards of the film industry define her. This film attempts to show the tussle between the hermaphrodite child Emmi as a redefinition of alternative sexuality beyond the patriarchal realm and the mother, a victim of anathema and bound to the land. At the end, a fair effort to break certain stereotypical sexual constructs and establishment of alternatives. Daman deals with the domestic violence. How does marriage as an institution perpetuate and approve wife battering, sexual abuse and humiliation as unquestioned norm, is what Lajmi tries to counter. Daman is a journey of a transformation of wife situated in patriarchy to a strong, bold and empowered mother. Chingaari is a story about forbidden beings i.e. prostitutes. The film tries to expose the hidden truth of sexual exploitation of sex workers by the religious preachers who preach in day light that prostitution should be abolished, and prostitute is like an incurable disease and they become lustful, exploitative beings

in dark. It's an avenge story of Basanti, a downtrodden woman who represents the oppressed, who kills the priest to show the rebel of her community.

Claire Johnston said the sign 'woman' can be analysed as a structure, a code or convention. It represents the ideological meaning that 'woman' has for men. Women are often represented as 'not-man'. The 'woman-as woman' is absent from the text of the film (1991: 26). But cinema of Kalpana Lajmi is an attempt to transform the meek female body from being an object of voyeurism and gaze to project it with self-identity, dignity and Individuality. Women as narrators in Lajmi's cinema are not protagonists who address the masses, they are the rebel in their own small male dominating worlds. They too have extremes of tolerance to malevolence, inhumanity and sadism. For patriarchy supporters, Lajmi's women can be labelled as going astray and transgressed but these are the crude realities /aspects of their souls. They argue and counter the system and question the patriarchs. May be for the people like Priest, Saikia, Lakhsham Singh these questioning women are transgressed. Opiniated, with full of desires, argumentative, forthcoming, rebellious, sexually assertive and resisting women are the lead in Lajmi's cinema not subscribing a portrayal of sympathy gainer selves. Voicing out their pain, dissatisfaction and agony and rather waiting for a messiah to make their lives worthy to live, taking up the challenge, struggling hard and emerging out as a strong headed winner. Even if her film has shown the woman as a victim or object of exploitation but has served the bold alternative end to it.

Her films can be analysed in two ways, one she brought women from marginality to centrality and secondly women's/identity issues which were kept in marginality for example sexuality, extra marital affair, alternative sexualities, transgender, homosexuality in to centrality. Various feminist criticisms have tried to give counter arguments and views regarding the projection of the feminine. In her analysis of the historical development of women's writing, Elaine Showalter presents three important stages. The first stage was more or less about the imitation of the 'mainstream' patriarchal literary tradition; the second stage was the one of protest against the standards of this dominant tradition concerning social values and rights; the third stage in the historical tradition of women's writing is one of self-discovery and self-assertion. Showalter identifies these stages as Feminine, Feminist and Female (in Goel 2010: 405). For other film makers and majority viewers it could be a counter narrative but it is actually women narrative from women point of view. Women who is not always erratic (as portrayed mostly) is an erotic self too.

Lajmi's cinema is a voice to women with different colours. The narratives are the stories of exploring the self. If it is about the sexual exploration then she tried to keep the narration away from prejudices and moral validation and scrutiny. Her narrators

question and ask whose life is it anyways. Lajmi does not subscribe that her narration is the only and ultimate truth or reality but definitely subscribes the alternative tales and voices. Reaching to the depth of issue to address the discrimination and unlayering the individual self and its freedom, and how the gender keeps the woman at margins and her sexuality completely invisible, Lajmi questions (uncomfortable) that binary and gap and tried to showcase other side of the story; herstory. Priyam, Sanichari, Emmi, Zeenat, Durga and Basanti each one is in a search of self. They have a journey from self- realization to self- assertion which completes the self-discovery. Lajmi tried to convey and showcase the power within (her) woman consists.

Lajmi as a director was clear about the use of camera. It is well defined that camera is an object which has no gender but its use produces gender. If the gender lense/ gaze is used then undoubtedly the craft would be gendered. Lajmi redefined the use and language of the camera. She avoided sexiest camera work where unnecessary gazing is done on female body. But her sexual lense aptly captured the female desires and eroticism.

Resisting Sexual Stereotypes: Time to Change

Cinema of Kalpana Lajmi shows women's issues brilliantly. Issues taken up cannot be categorised as women issues only and the director, a feminist. Issues reflected in these movies are issues of masses which affect the whole society. We have to come out from this notion that all men enjoy patriarchy. Lajmi constructs women as protagonists, who have always, been a symbol of submission and are given power to overcome patriarchy and carve an identity in a male-dominated Indian society. She always takes an effort to give space to divergent voices in her films to subvert the supremacy of patriarchal projections in films.

As Geetha Ramanathan points out, there is a constant effort by the women filmmakers to shun patriarchal images... It is up to them to rewrite the 'cultural narratives' and give counter arguments to ideas that have so far not been questioned and in the process establish women's authority by rejecting patriarchal boundaries (2006: 204-205).

Main stream Woman- centric cinema gives a pseudo projection of woman as protagonist. It is a noticeable fact for mainstream Indian cinema that the female protagonists are hardly projected from a woman's point of view. Her role is the reprisal of the already prevalent stereotypes as a lover, whore, wife, mother, vamp etc. with liberal adjectives attached to them (Agarwal, 2009: 86). Women writers, producers and directors can take an opportunity to create a space for themselves with "their /women's stories: carving new narrations with gendered/sexual lens where

woman is shown a heroine in the real sense. While the patriarchal ideology has generally influenced the depiction of women in films, a feminist narrative (films) would enable the forthcoming generations of women to believe in the power of their expressions and tales (Ramanathan, 2006: 168). Cinema of NRI film makers like Deepa Mehta, Meera Nair, Gurinder Chadha gives entirely different definition to women and “her” narration to story, here back home, women film makers are raising consciousness and attempting to break gender and sexual myths through the vast canvas of their creations. Stereotyping leads to a one-dimensional understanding of a community and the way it is represented in cinema (Mitra, 1999: 22). When we see the cinema made for the masses, we find female body is shown and constructed as patriarchal possessions. The audience is served images that are a product of the male gaze and defined by the patriarchal norms of society. The women on the screen are either the projections of male fear or their fantasies (Mulvey, 2009: 156). Alongside the depiction of the individuals who do not fall under this binary always a vulnerable lot targeted to mockery or exploitation. Canvas of cinema and its characterisation of narrators need to be broadened. It is heartening to see that the admirers of such cinemas are growing and critically reviewing the work and reaching out to masses. The writers, directors and film makers specially women are showcasing their re-imagined work which is more real and crude from gender and sexuality point of view.

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