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**BREAKING THE TABOOS OF GENDERED AND CULTURAL STEREOTYPES IN DEEPA MEHTA'S
*FIRE***

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Films play a major role in influencing the daily lives of the people by cultivating the stereotypes of Gender and Culture. These stereotypes mould the perspectives of the people thereby inculcating a patriarchal order in the society where men should rule and women, the passive bearers of this oppression. It is this gender construction in media that has complicated the thoughts of people, by drawing instances from myth and folklore. People have been knotted to those culture and tradition that forbids women to come into forefront and as a result they have to suppress their dreams and desires to have a better living. Even in this present scenario they lack the freedom to think and act, as they are bounded by the societal norms and conventions.

Fire by Deepa Mehta is one such movie that depicts the silent struggles that women have to undergo in this patriarchal society. In the film, she presents the tale of two young Indian women who are neglected by their husbands for celibacy or mistresses over their wives. There sprouts a passionate relationship between these two central characters thereafter, which the Indian Culture forbids. The film questions the hypocrisy concerning women and sexuality. It also presents the conflict between traditional Indian culture and expectations with a strong emphasis given to the female characters.

Even though Civilization has helped in changing the mindset of the people from the rigid traditions but the roots of culture stay heavily on them. The differentiation among people has aroused out of religion, race and culture and thus a group of people started following a particular culture and from this culture they started cultivating certain beliefs and thus relationships became culturally bound. Even if the trait of certain culture varies, they have all stemmed out of the same source. The film in particular draws attention to the oppressed lives of Indian women in a tradition bound society.

The film depicts a conservative society in which the central characters challenge the rules of their culture. Ashok, a businessman lives with his wife Radha, his brother Jatin, mother Biji and the man-servant Mundu in a clustered Delhi neighborhood. Men and women have gender-defined roles that neither challenges until the Jatin's wife Sita arrives. Sita mocks at the button marked tradition that pushes her to do something which she really doesn't want to.

Ashok, a middle aged man takes an oath of celibacy when he found that Radha is incapable of bearing children. He is a man who strongly believes that desire is the root of all the evil and believes in miracles. He strives to seek union with the Universal truth. Religious insight blinds the true insight of life for Ashok. In order to get rid of his temptation he makes Radha lay by his side and when he feels he is no more tempted he asks her to go back to sleep. Here Radha serves as a means in helping him to move closer to God. Radha is being victimized by suppressing her desires for her husband's needs.

Sita, on the other hand possessing more modern ideas accepts Jatin's love for another woman and leaves him behind. Radha and Sita present the two conflicting attitudes of Women. Radha has known life only after Sita's arrival, she was struggling between what a woman want and what one is expected to want. Radha at the end proves that there is no life without desire and there is no point in living without desire.

Fire directed by a woman resents a social system in which many women have no rights even after the country has gained freedom. The film brings into the forefront a serious, relevant and revolutionary issue that torments the lives of many women in the name of culture. The title itself symbolizes the burning desire to find love. It is the loneliness that Radha and Sita shared drew them much closer to a forbidden relationship.

The film breaks the taboos of Indian tradition and culture and gives importance to dignity and self-fulfillment. The woman in *Fire* comes out of their oppressed life and crosses the borders of culture. Their passionate love and desire creates an urge in them to start a new life together away from the shackles of society.

The centrality of women is focused in the film from all the aspects. The issues related to female identity, sexuality and social location are brought into forefront in the name of religion that serves as a catalyst to regulate and control women. The social construction of gender and compulsory heterosexuality is looked out on a different perspective by intersecting religion and politics. Mehta rejects the objectification of women that takes place in Indian Cinema. The film pioneers a movement of freedom for women, a new shift of perspective to the Indian films.

As Sita says, it is the button mark tradition that holds them back to enjoy freedom. It is the blossoming relationship between Radha and Sita in the film and their choices to defy and challenge the cultural and gender expectations makes them free. Throughout the film, there are specific and significant scenes in which Sita questions the culture where only women are assigned to fast for the longevity of their husband's life.

Thus the two central characters in the film, Radha and Sita challenge both gendered and cultural stereotypes by reacting and choosing to not settle for a life that is not fulfilling them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Here Mehta advises to be true to oneself rather than sticking on to the norms that makes one unhappy.

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