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PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SHORT FILMS

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ABSTRACT

India is the largest and a wide- ranging film delivering nation in the world and also stands at the top three in print broadcasting and digital media. The most one of kind highlights of the Indian entertainment industry is its assorted variety and profundity. Cinema has become the cornerstone of the present era. It is very important to understand that whatever may be the medium, cinema shall always remain the womb of stars and the screen icons will keep on impacting popular patterns. Even though in the most recent decades, the feminist discourse has produced a spurt of publications of on the women of the society, but still there lies a dearth of material on the 'New 'Women' of the society and also the role of a woman with respect to short films. Domestic violence at home is a worldwide issue across the nation. This issue is wide spread, profoundly ingrained and it seriously affects a woman's wellbeing and prosperity. This paper shall thereby spur the women to come out of traditionalism and fight against the odds. The short films 'Crossing the Waters' and 'The Relationship Manager' depict that how domestic violence affects a woman's life. The films taken in this paper has been innovative in itself as it discovers the concept of the polarity between traditionalism and modernism of the women in the society. The study adds color and texture to the shades of women being portrayed in the society. It also portrays the flexibility and versatility of the 'New Woman'. Short films these days are highly appreciated as they are considerably more evident and go directly to the point. Short films don't have to be entertaining and there is no romantic sequence in such films but what remains important is that the central idea of the movie has to be conveyed well.

Keywords: Domestic violence, gender disparity, quest for herself, women in society/short films, women as a warrior.

“If you want to know what it’s like to survive hell and still come out shining brighter than the Sun, just look into the eyes of a woman who has survived intense damage and refused to allow it to destroy her softness.” – Nikita Gill (Poet and Writer)

Domestic violence is a widespread affliction that tears the texture of communities and menaces the life, well-being and exhilaration of the affected women. In spite of the fact that women in the current scenario have substantiated themselves in every aspect of life but still there exist such women who are becoming the victims of domestic violence. Have you ever heard about a man being tortured by a woman on grounds of domestic violence? In 95% of the cases the answer is No!! “According to the Study of Domestic Violence among currently married females of Haryana, India-only 0.1% to 4.5% of females have ever initiated physical and emotional violence respectively against their husbands.” The aim is to focus on the way women’s point of view has been portrayed in the recent Bollywood trend of short films. Domestic violence does not only talk about physical abuse but it equally focuses on the mental and emotional health of a woman. The films taken up for this purpose where domestic violence is faced by a woman are ‘Crossing the Waters’ (2019) and ‘The Relationship Manager’ (2020).

The film ‘Crossing the Waters’ is a twelve minute short film on ‘domestic violence’ faced by a woman. The film is produced by the Soil Film Production Company. Soil Films was established in 2013 as an independent, women-driven and International Film Production Company situated in Berlin. The production company is creating and delivering innovative projects based on ‘personal stories’ with a strong universal methodology for a huge and assorted crowd. Soil Film has partnered with “Narika”, California based non-profit organization that underpins the victims of brutality and domestic violence, especially in South Asian Communities. The escalating domestic violence across the country has been taboo to discuss about and tragically been a norm for many women of India and other countries as well. The victims of domestic violence find it hard to come out of such unfortunate circumstances so organizations like Narika promote any women’s independence and well-being by assisting these victims of domestic violence and further they also help the survivors of domestic violence with reinforcement, education and advocacy. This group works with assorted community accomplices and renders services to those women and children who are under the trauma of domestic violence in languages like English, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam, Nepali, Kannada, Konkani, Telugu and Urdu. Such non-profit organization can bring chaos under control in a woman’s life.

The film ‘Crossing the Waters’ is a real life story of a woman, Radhika, a creative writer by profession who like any other girl dreamt of a happy marriage and a simple life, to call it a new home away from her home but her life and dreams turned upside down when she was physically, emotionally and mentally abused by her husband. The story plots her dangerous escape from such traumatic life. Radhika lived in a small world of fear because her husband’s personal objective was to decimate her identity. The film intended to evaluate the pervasiveness and attributes of domestic violence and injuries among the married women. The film clearly portrayed that how domestic violence had a serious impact on Radhika’s health and well-being. Perhaps, it is has been noted that a woman is not safe at her own house, a home which she dreams of since childhood that she would get the maximum love from her husband in the new house but she is shattered by witnessing the hardcore sufferings. For woman like Radhika, law implementation and awareness should be made stringent with respect to domestic violence. The life of Radhika is just one of the examples of the miserable condition of women facing domestic violence across the country. Reports of viciousness against women are a lot higher in number in fact it has been found that women are the only ultimate sufferers in a marriage. It has been found that the condition of a woman deteriorates only because of the prevalent attitude of the society that women are more vulnerable on physical, emotional and economical level as compared to that of the men. If a woman experiences brutality, there are chances of women suffering from mental problems like depression, anxiety, suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder. Radhika in the film accepts her husband’s violence as a part of her married life. The wild energies of her husband were absorbed silently by her. Women consider it is a natural duty of a wife to accept whatever treatment is given to her by her husband. Similarly Radhika’s innocence led

her to such miserable condition. Despite of witnessing her husband's brutal propensities, she cooks food for him. Maybe she thought that if she performs her duties diligently she might regain her husband's love and the other reason of her cooking reflects her fear, agitation and nervousness. She might have the fear that if she doesn't give food to her husband on time she might suffer more violence. Probably, it has been noted that Radhika became a victim of the second situation. Radhika was in need of help but her stony silence, quietly bearing her husband's misbehavior reflected her coward nature. The silence derailed her marital life. Isn't it ironic that if a qualified, educated girl like Radhika has suffered to such great extent in her life then we cannot even imagine on what will be the condition of a woman in the rural sections of the patriarchal society where people still believe that the birth of a woman is a shame for their family. This is an endless loop where people of patriarchal society think that women are simply the abettors for the family. Radhika's agonizing life was confined to the four walls of a wash room. Washroom here can be identified as a metaphor in the film because it is not just a bath place but it is a kind of peaceful place for Radhika where she can 'breathe' freely just for few minutes because nobody would enter there specially her husband. Her childhood photograph, her passport, her certificate of honor in recognition of an outstanding writer kept in the washroom brings a smile on her face. Unfortunately the only place in the whole big house was the washroom where she could at least smile and comfort her heart for some time. She was quite scared of her husband which becomes evident by the very fact that she kept those things in the washroom. The washroom here depicts the inner corner of her heart. For once she decides to take a call against her husband but her fear stopped her from doing so. A woman out of fear fails to understand that the trauma-related maladies should not be denied. A woman thinks that nothing could be worse than confronting her darkest self, so she tries to dodge it in any of the worst circumstance. This is what Radhika did; she dodged her miserable condition because she was not ready to accept her dark life. A woman fails to realize that healing cannot be encouraged by hiding up in the four walls. But pain can be cured only if one tries to venture out in the clear light of the day. Of course the process of healing requires a long time be it a physical injury or a mental injury, it might be a long drawn and unbearable process, but is the sole way for a woman's self-identity and freedom. Even after experiencing the palpable discomfort in the air for so many years of marriage, her innocence never let her take any action. Owing to the domestic violence inflicted upon her Radhika experienced severe breakdown in health which included her face injury, emotional affliction, suicidal thoughts and physical symptoms of severe illness and became a victim of unintended pregnancy or should I say a brutal pregnancy.

One of the most significant and symbolic affair that has been noted in the film which needs to be focused on is the performance of sexual act between the couple. Sex, more than physical desire is a kind of beautiful emotional act between a man and a woman. The beauty of this emotional and physical act simply breaks the meaning of the act in the minds of all those women who worship this word. It has been seen that the male protagonist in the film indulges in sexual activity mainly to vent out his frustration and satisfy his lust. Men these days are using sex as an 'insatiable demand'; men are forgetting their moral values. Performing a physical act against the consent of a woman is a crime. Men's brutal behavior leaves the women, the wives in a depressed and miserable state. A woman thinks that, to the person she will marry will be a knight in shining armor and will take her to a world of dreams but leaves her daunted when her expectations meet her reality. This is what happened with Radhika. The life of a simple, honorable woman Radhika takes a turn when she finds about her pregnancy. Becoming a 'Mother' is a desire for any woman but for Radhika it turned out to be a 'blessing'. On hearing the news of Radhika's pregnancy, her husband turned more ferocious and violent towards her, further gave a statement to abort the child. It has been noted that from this moment, Radhika's life takes a U-turn. She decides to raise her voice for the sake of her child. This child gave her new hope and strength of a happy life she had always dreamt of. The pivotal role of a mother is always to protect her child against all the odds and evils. A mother is a divine soul and she is a lady who will support her child through thick and thin. Radhika becomes a divine soul for her unborn child. Hence we see that how a woman changes her own identity for the sake of her child. For a long time Radhika was coward because she quietly permitted herself to be manhandled without opposing but her inner voice of protecting her child came after several years of intolerable pain. Sooner or later a woman has to speak to break the barriers. Better to be late than never! 'Crossing the Waters' itself delineates a beautiful metaphor. 'Crossing the Waters' has a profound meaning for

all those timid women of the society who are living their life within the four boundaries. The title continues to push the wrap between the dark and the light. The title depicts the polarity between the dark and the light in each and every woman of the society. It has been noted that her child becomes her backbone; therefore she decides to stand firmly for herself and not to bear any domestic violence again in her life. The film equally instigates in us to love our mothers more each day because it is the mother who can go to any extent to save her child from any danger. A mother bears all the pains but she never lets her child suffer in any of the circumstance. That's the beauty of a mother depicted as Radhika in the film.

Similarly, the short film *The Relationship Manager* (2020) truly depicts the miserable condition of a woman in the four walls of her house. While our lives were super turbulent during the year 2020 because of the novel coronavirus what remained a matter of severe concern was the escalation in domestic violence cases even during the lockdown period. On one hand, where people were making the most of this lockdown period by spending a quality time with their family on the other hand there had been an enormous jump up where women faced domestic violence, physical and verbal abuse during this period. According to the recent data released by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), the lockdown period has aggravated the cases of domestic violence all over the country. According to the report, 70 cases of domestic violence from rural and urban areas have been reported to the commission since the imposition of lockdown in West Bengal. According to the recent data by Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Sumit Sen domestic violence complaints are at a 10-year high during the pandemic COVID-19 lockdown and 86% of the women did not seek any help. As per the reports and the news there has been an alarming rise in domestic violence cases from 25th March -31st May 2020. 1,477 complaints were reported by women. The short film 'The Relationship Manager' is composed and coordinated by Falguni Thakore focusing exactly on such a pathetic situation faced by a woman in the midst of this pandemic. The director within a span of 18 minutes has very well portrayed the condition of the majority of women during lockdown. *The Relationship Manager* is a charming and splendidly composed short film that touches the sensitive subject of a woman's mindset when in a damaging relationship and how she handles it well. The film somehow portrays that even in the midst of pandemic 'women's' suffering has no end. The plot revolves around a relationship manager of a bank characterized as Vinay (Anup Soni) while Kavita (Divya Dutta) is one of his customers. The short film 'The Relationship Manager' set in the background of the lockdown that has surrendered nearly everybody homebound opens on a sweet note depicting the life of a happy married couple spending a gala time with each other in the midst of the pandemic. On the contrary, in the next minute there is a scene where Vinay overhears the screaming of a woman on a phone call and the reason for screaming is none other than the top most problem faced by a woman i.e. domestic violence. In a span of 18 minutes, Vinay and Kavita structure an engaging and emotional conversation that was comfortable, cordial yet persuasive and powerful. Divya Dutt has brilliantly played the role of a home maker who confronts maltreatment from her husband and Anup Soni acted as a relationship manager who overhears a sound that causes him to think that something is wrong. Therefore, he decides to call her and raise a helping hand. Even though being a bank's rep, he very well manages to extend assistance without sounding excessively interrupting. Anup's lines have been composed crisply to keep away from any melodrama that may sneak in for such circumstances. He imparts a personal experience with his client in order to raise a helping hand and help her to deal such a situation. The director has tried best to make the situation quite natural and serious yet make it look authentic in the best way possible. The film is a power-stuffed record of a usual day in his regular schedule. On the call, Vinay makes Kavita comfortable by narrating a short story of his elder sister, a powerful and always smiling woman who ended up killing herself because of the suffering. On continuing the conversation Vinay tells that maybe his sister is at better place now, he somehow tries his best to relate his sister's horrible painful marriage with Kavita, so that she pours her heart out or maybe after hearing she decides to take a stand for herself. As expected Kavita just felt relieved and shares her own experience as a wife, the violence she experiences in her own life she tries to relate it with Vinay's sister. The moment when Kavita said, "I feel sorry for her. It's difficult when you are left with no options, when your kin turn their back and nobody helps you, when your life doesn't belong to you alone", portrays her miserable and pathetic life of a wife. The background silence and her low voice show how hollow her life is as a woman. Vinay tries his best to give her solace and consolation by telling her, 'No abuse can be a good trade-off'. He said a woman who

taught him to walk and how to live...why couldn't she fend against the hands that abused her? Why couldn't she win? Why couldn't she walk out? The awkward silence after hearing these lines tells us very clearly that she started to think about her own miseries. She ponders on her thoughts that what would the world say if a woman leave a husband's house? Would the world support if a woman walks out? The last lines of Vinay led Kavita think of her life as an individual, as a woman that why a woman always has to care about a world that never cared about her pain. A woman always keeps her husband on priority but she barely gets what she deserves. The line 'She failed her kids' forces her to think of all the violence she suffered and thereby at the end it has been noted that Kavita looks herself in the mirror and calls the police.

"Every person who contacts the Hotline gives us a small glimpse of their unshakeable strength, because simply contacting us is an act of bravery". -- National Domestic Violence Hotline

It is very rare to find such a convincing material compacted into an 18 minute narrative. Falguni Thakore tried her best to portray what's exactly going on in our society and further delivers the message in a hard-hitting way. The title of the film is brilliantly justified at the end of the film.

What I feel is all a woman needs is a push, a push to fight for her, a push to raise voice for her own self. The closing of the film is very empowering. It's worth appreciating that a man helped a woman to deal with another man, he gave an ounce of fearlessness to the casualty of domestic violence and turned a woman to be emancipating and stand up for herself in the hour of trouble.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study of the above films in feminist perspective, we have realized that women in many rural and urban areas are viewed as their husband's property even today. They are forced to live a life where what went on behind closed doors should not be discussed with others. The dread of being evaded and shunned by society prevents a woman from ending abusive relationships. The social stigma for a divorce makes her bear intolerable pain. The blind faith on her marriage for years reflecting the traditional mindset of people that one day everything will fall at the right place or considering their failed marriage as part of destiny gives birth to many more torturing years ahead. Women in marriages mostly think that 'sacrifice' in their married life are justified from centuries. The religious belief that only sacrifices could be the greatest virtue for their future should be changed. If this mentality changes only then they can bring about change around themselves but if they continue to bear the pains a man gives, they are kind of igniting a man to perform more brutal acts. One shall understand that a woman has profound interests and desires within herself before entering into a married life but because of the society's taboo she binds herself within the four walls and does not let any light enter her life. But if a woman continues to live such a dark life her life would become a hell, as a famous writer Rabindranath Tagore has rightly said, "You cannot cross the sea by merely standing and staring at the waters." Similarly, if a woman has to cross the sea i.e. cross the oppressions which the society and the men are giving her, she has to raise a voice boldly for her own self. She has to cross the sea to go the other end. She has to put in efforts to travel from a world of darkness to a world of light.

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