

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SEXUALITY: A STUDY OF BOLLYWOOD MOVIE LIPSTICK UNDER MY BURKHA

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Abstract

In the era of post-colonialism, margins have started knocking back the centre and Indian mainstream cinema is no exception to this. From the inception of Indian Cinema, it sidelined marginal elements- especially women- but with the passage of time, it is adopting the 'Road Not Taken' yet. All over the world, the issue of Women Empowerment is in discussion. Feminist writers have been upheld this issue and have given way through various platforms. Gayatri Spivak and Meenakshi Thapan, talk about women empowerment in detail in their works.

Empowerment is reflected through women assertion. Rebel, resistance, skills of negotiating and crisis management and abusive use of language are their tools of assertion. Empowerment is seen when protagonists' from film – '*Lipstick under My Burkha*'- openly express their dreams and desires and seek freedom from social, cultural, economical and bodily clutches. Their empowerment is reflected through their rebel against society's sexual norms. These empowered women represent the image of new woman who is no longer submissive but assertive and thus tries to form new equations of equality

Key Words: Indian mainstream cinema, Women Empowerment, assertion, rebel, equality.

In the era of post-colonialism, margins have started knocking back at the centre and Indian mainstream cinema is no exception to this. From the inception of Indian Cinema, it sidelined marginal elements- especially women- but with the passage of Time, it is adopting the 'Road Not Taken' yet. All over the world, the issue of Women Empowerment is in discussion. Feminist writers have upheld this issue and have given way through various platforms. Gayatri Spivak and Meenakshi Thapan, talk about women empowerment in detail in their works. Empowerment is seen through women assertion. Spivak in her work "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" upheld the subject of the subaltern women. Thapan (2009) calculates women assertion in terms of voice, will and agency and Spivak in her book, *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, defines agency as institutionally validated action.

There are various definitions of women empowerment. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines empowerment as the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you. Anita Vaidyanathan (2013) defines empowerment as "women's ability to negotiate strategies, manipulate and rebel against events, situations". For Bina Agarwal, (2008) empowerment is a process whereby individuals through individual or collective acts of resistance and rebellion bring a change in exciting power relations. Neera Tondon (2008) also exhibits her view of empowerment. For Tondon, a woman who is aware of her identity and dignity and who fights against oppression and subjugation is an empowered woman. Resistances, rebellion, negation, retaliation, conflict management are the modes through which women assert their empowerment.

Director Alankrita Shrivastava's movie '*Lipstick under My Burkha*' has bagged the Oxfam Award for Best Film on Gender equality. The film is a covert drama of city protagonist named- Rehana Abidi, Leela, Usha Parmar and Shirin Aslam - and their journey of desires and dreams. The narrative of these four protagonists is based on a character named Rosie, the heroine of the erotic novel '*Lipstick Dreams*' that Usha alias Bauji reads in secret. Through their defiant efforts (overtly or covertly) they collectively seek liberation from closed doors. These metropolitan (Bhopal) protagonists are dream lovers and have dreams "of financial independence, of becoming a singer, of moving to a big city and, of simply enjoying life" (www.hindustantimes.com)

Rehana Abidi is the youngest protagonist, just 18 and a college goer. She has a dream of singer. Her idol is Milky Cyrus and listen her song secretly hiding from her orthodox parent. Her empowerment is exerted through motto of liberation. Liberation is her motto, be it jeans or life, she aggressively voices against society thus, 'why does our freedom scare you so? Don't we have the right to live freely? We want our right. Our right to jeans! Our right to live! She enjoys both smoke and drink in party.

Usha Parmar alias Buaji is 55, oldest among all protagonists, and the owner of Hawai Manzil. Through the character 'Rosie' of erotic fiction (Lipstick Dreams) Usha is reading, exerts her desire of sex. This symbolic character displays the desires of all protagonists to live their life according to their interest. Usha takes all the neighboring children for swimming lessons. Encountered with Jaspal, the swimming coach, who is her fantasized hero, Usha's desire to learn swimming opens up. At the later age of her life, she is ready to learn swimming, just because a desire for attaining carnival instincts from swimming coach. The intensity of her libido instincts expose through phone sex under the name Rosie. The phone sex is a innovate idea of director.

Usha's empowerment is seen in her skills of negotiating and crisis management. Usha's skills of negotiating are great. She is master at crisis management skill. She identifies a power- money nexus between builder and government officers. When municipal officers approach with a notice to demolish Hawai Manzil on a trivial base, she discerns the builders hand in this act and quickly settles the matter by bribing them. She asks them in such manner, "How did the government think of Hawai Manzil? We all know who's put you up to this. How much has Bemisaal Builders paid you?"

Shirin Aslam, is a bread winner. Secretly she works as salesgirl. The company declares her as best salesgirl. Her empowerment lies in her negotiation skills which are noteworthy. It is that a skill leads her to promotion from a salesgirl to a sales trainer. She is master in such job skills. She has no right over her body unlike other protagonists. Her husband, Rahim finds pleasure in her body whereas she is hungry for love. Her empowerment is mirrored through her courageous and bold attitude. Shirin is a courageous enough that she reaches at the home of a woman who is a darling of Rahim and boldly warns her to live away from her husband. She threatens her thus, "of course, you can't put what is mine into your mouth. Shirin Aslam, wife of Rahim Aslam". She shuns her husband for his bad character. She asserts, "You are the one who is shameless... Seeing another woman... no job, no salary."

Leela, a beautician, is constantly in effort to surpass her beauty parlor business and has a dream to settle into Delhi with Muslim Boyfriend. Her empowerment lies in her spirit to follow her mind. In true sense, she exerts her right over body having sex according to her will and mood. She enjoys sex with her boyfriend, Arshad on the very day of her engagement with Manoj. Not only she makes video of sex but threatens her boyfriend thus, "Bustard, if you ditch me, I will post this video on Facebook. You won't be able to show your face anywhere in Bhopal". In a visit to fiancée's home, Leela envisions her probable feature of housewife and instantly lost the happiness of marriage with Manoj. She is ready to sacrifice her marriage knot for the sake of her dream. Disappointed with unwilling matchmaking with Manoj, she expresses her desire before her boyfriend in this way, "the same rotten lanes, the same rotten life. I don't want to live here. Arshad, let's at have sex. In Indian scenario, a matter is most condemnable when an engagement girl meets her lover at night in his home. However, the spirit to follow her mind can't be ignored. Her boldness is awesome, when she says, "the bathroom is empty. Let's go. We will leave for Delhi the day after Dipawali carnival. I have booked our train tickets

The title is apt and suggestive. Burkha is the leitmotif of suppression of women by patriarchy however all protagonists tore it using scissor of lipstick (desires), especially Rehana who sews Burkha but throws it when she is out of the house. In this regard, Kriti Tulsiani observes, "the strength of this film, however, lies in Alankrita Shrivastava's handling of the subject...she offers us a narrative, bold enough to arouse a woman's hidden desires and valiant enough to question the patriarch mindset." (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). Alankrita portrays realistic characters. Her skill lies in equal representation of Hindu and Muslim protagonists. Ironically, the youngsters (Rehana and Leela) are from-Hindu and Muslim- religions respectively and are more rebellious and outward. Evaluating on this point, all are spokespersons of modernity, be it style, boldness etc. In this regard, comments Riya Ghosh, "... Alankrita Shrivastav scrutinizes every corner and empathy to inculcate a stirring account of women's empowerment". (<https://en.wikipedia.org>)

Conclusion-

These empowered women represent the image of new woman who is no longer submissive but assertive and thus tries to form new equations of equality. They are seekers of their dreams in their ways and are hungry of freedom from social, cultural, economical and bodily clutches. They listen their “inner voice” and bring forth the socially taboo subject of sex and assert themselves covertly or overtly. Their background of –village or city- is no more hindrance to their empowerment. The DNA of rebel exhibits similar nerve between village and city dwelling protagonists. Rebel, resistance, skills of negotiating and crisis management and abusive use of language are their tools of assertion. They advise patriarchy, thus, in Rani’s words, “don’t hurry to be a man. Learn to be human first”. At last their collective empowerment could be expressed through Usha’s mouth like this, “ She won’t veil her desire .the iron bars at the window cannot hold Rosy back now! Rosy fixed her hair, wiped her tears and jumped right out of the door

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