



Portrayal of the struggle of women against Unjust and Forced Patriarchy in Indian movies and Indian fiction

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**“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless
The condition of women is improved.
It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.”
-Swami Vivekananda
Abstract**

The present paper is an attempt to show the struggle of women against unjust and forced patriarchy in Indian society. It is about the status of women in Indian society. As we all know that the creation of world is not possible without the woman, even after that we never give her the place, respect and honor she deserves. Women are being treated as subordinates to males in all over the world; they have a secondary status in this man dominated world. Things have changed a lot but even today there is male – chauvinist mentality that females are just to obey males whether they are correct or not. They are not allowed to disobey males at any cost; If they do so, it hurts their male ego and pride and due to this they suffer mentally as well as physically also. The males are supposed to be the supreme creation of the God and females are the worst creation ever. This paper deals with the exploitation of women in Indian society; they are the victims of so many evils of the society like- killing infant girl child in the womb of their mother, dowry, and domestic violence, and rape, sexual and mental harassment and so on. This paper is about their struggle against society, a struggle for identity, equality and happiness. It also throws some light on the fact that, what happens when female revolts against the unjust and exploitation.

Key words: Women’s status in Indian society, Exploitation of women (dowry, domestic violence, sexual and mental harassment), Struggle against patriarchy, *Lajja*, *Parched*

India is a country where woman is supposed to be the embodiment of Maa Durga, the epitome of strength and power re-incarnated bringing out the doomsday of human follies and vices. She is the creator for she fructifies and fosters life. But unfortunately it is the same land where for years a woman has been physically, emotionally and psychologically exploited and the sanctity of woman is violated Here we worship girls as the epitome of Goddess Durga at the same time many of girls get killed in the womb of their mothers just because they are girl child. We find a very contradict situation here and the plight of women in India is a great concern. The problem is that we never treat her like a common human being, either we worship her like a goddess or treat her like an object or in a very derogatory manner, we never talk about the equality of rights, we never treat her alike the males. She is not allowed to have an individual identity of her own. Throughout her life she remains busy in fulfilling the roles designed for her. She lives her life for others, not for herself and I wish, woman no more remains the synonymous of, 'subjugation'. It's the high time that she must be restored to the same pedestal of glory she was there long time before.

Now let us see some points of *Ramayana*, which are connected to the theme of the movie. We all have heard about the struggle of Sita ji in Ramayana. She was a daughter of Mother Earth, adopted by King Janaka, and when Rama went to Mithila he got a chance to marry her by breaking the Shiv Dhanush (bow) while trying to tie a knot to it in a competition organized by King Janaka of Mithila in Dhanusa. The competition was to find the most suitable husband for Sita and many princes from different states competed to win her. Sita is the avatara of goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. Sita is portrayed as the epitome of female purity and virtue. She follows her husband into exile and is abducted by the demon king Ravana. She is imprisoned on the island of Lanka, until Rama rescues her by defeating Ravana. Later, she gives birth to twin boys Luv and Kusha.

We know her by her different names like Janki, Vaidehi, Maithli , Ramdulari etc., all these names are used in the movie to depict the female characters of the movie. They all have their own problems and struggles. They try to fight against the evil plans of male dominated society. In Ramayana, we find sita ji's struggle throughout her life, after getting married with

Rama, she went for exile with her husband, just to fulfill her duty of an ideal wife, there she was abducted by Ravana and she suffered there for a long time to save her honor and dignity, if she wanted, she could have get married with Ravana but she was an ideal Indian woman, that's why she suffered there. Her struggle was not yet over, later she was asked to give Agni-Pariksha just to prove her purity. Just to fulfill the demand of fickle minded people of society she gave agni –pariksha and saved her honor again.

Now the thing is that she was the avatara of Goddess Lakshmi, even then she was forced to give an exam to save her honor, how can we think about the common woman to live without any problem? Did we ever think what would have happened if Sita ji had declined to give that Agni- pariksha? What would have been the result if she had not fulfilled the wish of society? And what about the common women, how they can live a safe and secure life in this society? It's like that women have to give so many exams in their lives just to prove their innocence. We can't expect their lives without so many sacrifices and problems which they face due to this male dominated society.

I wanted to elaborate this struggle of females with the help of movie *Lajja*. The movie captured various evils of the society – deep-seated attitudes of patriarchy, child marriage, dowry, marital rapes and physical and mental abuse of women. The female characters in the movie are the very portrayal of Indian woman who suffers throughout her life; there is a journey of females to get their individual status or identity, their happiness, to fulfill their own desires, to make their own world of their dreams. The film is based on the plight of women in India. The movie satirizes the honor with which women are placed in society and the restrictions on them. The movie recounts the story of four women's (Maithili, Janki, Ramdulaari, and Vaidehi) are all versions of Sita, the ideal Hindu woman's name. These names are also very symbolical and have a message regarding the status of women in the society. The story begins with Vaidehi's (Manisha Koirala) struggle who lives in New York with her husband Raghu(Jackie Shroff). On the outside, she lives a sophisticated life, but behind closed doors, her husband is abusive and has extramarital affairs. When she takes a stand for herself, she is banished from the household. She goes back to her parents' house but they too reject her. Vaidehi soon finds out that she is pregnant. Raghu gets into a car accident, which results in him being unable to father a child. When he discovers that Vaidehi is pregnant, he calls her, faking remorse, and asks for her to return. Vaidehi agrees, thinking Raghu has mended his ways. Raghu and his father plot for the child to become their heir and if Vaidehi intervenes, she will be killed. Meanwhile, Vaidehi is informed by a friend about

Raghu's true intentions, and so she escapes from his clutches, through her character we can see the quest for individual identity, she struggles a lot to save her child and she is helped by Raju (Anil Kapoor), a petty, but kindhearted thief. He hears Vaidehi's story and gives her money from his heist to help. To hide from Raghu and his henchmen, Vaidehi gatecrashes a wedding procession.

At the wedding, she meets Maithili (Mahima Chaudhary), a bride-to-be from a middle-class family. Maithili is marrying a man who hails from a rich background. The two women witness Maithili's father being hassled by demands for an opulent wedding, which he cannot afford, and is forced to pay dowry. Vaidehi tries to convince Raju to give his money from the heist. He initially refuses but changing his mind, he returns to give his heist money to Vaidehi. The groom's friend attempts to rape Maithili. As the wedding ceremony progresses, one of the guest recognises the heist money which initially belonged to him. Moreover, the groom's friend tells the groom's family that he spotted a man (Raju) in Maithili's room. Maithili is accused of having sexual relations with Raju in return for money, which leads Raju to accept his theft as the situation worsens. Having tolerated enough, Maithili insults the groom's family and they flee from the wedding. Here we can see the plight of woman.

Meanwhile, Vaidehi is found by Raghu, and forced into going with him. On the way, they encounter a protest mob. Raghu gets out of the car, which gives Vaidehi the chance to escape. She arrives in Haripur, a small town, where she meets Janki (Madhuri Dixit), a theatre actress in love with her colleague. Janki is pregnant, but not married. She doesn't care for society's norms. She is lusted after by the theatre director, Puroshottam (Tinu Anand), an older man who keeps his wife, Lata (Jaya Bhattacharya), confined to their house. Puroshottam talks against Janki to her lover, which creates a rift between them. She is asked to abort the child by her lover, as he suspects that he might not be the real father, indirectly accusing Janki of having sexual relations with the theatre director. Janki is outraged and messes up a scene during a performance of the Ramayan. This leads to an outcry from the audience and she is assaulted by the audience, leading to her having a miscarriage. Vaidehi confronts Puroshottam, who threatens to call her husband. However, Lata intervenes and takes Vaidehi to the station and puts her on a train.

The train is robbed by bandits but the passengers are saved by Bulwa (Ajay Devgan), a local dacoit. Vaidehi faints at the sight of blood, and Bulwa takes her to the local midwife, Ramdulaari (Rekha). Ramdulaari bravely opposes the village leaders Virendra (Gulshan

Grover) and Gajendra (Danny Denzongpa) who exploit innocent women, young and old. When her educated son Prakash (Sharman Joshi), who is trying to educate the villagers against the wishes of Virendra and Gajendra, falls in love with Gajendra's daughter, Sushma (Aarti Chhabria), all hell breaks loose. Gajendra slyly locks Ramdulaari in her house and sets out to find Prakash. When Prakash runs away with Sushma, Virendra and Gajendra, along with their goons, rape Ramdulaari and burn her alive. In a fit of rage, Bhulva and his goons kill Virendra and his goons. Vaidehi escapes with Sushma and Ramdulaari's son.

Gajendra is making a move into politics, so when he is applauded by the local authorities, Vaidehi intervenes and exposes Gajendra as a rapist and fraud through a heart-wrenching speech, which drives all the women in the audience to assault Gajendra, who is later killed by Bhulva. The speech changes Raghu's attitude towards Vaidehi and he decides to mend his ways. The two return to New York as a proper married couple. Vaidehi gives birth to a daughter who is named Ramdulaari. She meets Raju again, who is now a taxi driver and married to Maithili. She invites him to a charity dance show with Janki in the main role, wherein all the money from her shows goes to fund women's organizations in India.

We find the journey of Vaidehi, her journey to find her own self, to find her value, her identity. Throughout the movie we came across many other female characters who are the very part of this journey; they all the representative of this changing scenario. They all suffered a lot but did not surrender to the circumstances. They became rebel, they were accused, abused and tortured by their beloved ones, but they did not give up and decided to revolt against the social evils of the society. Most of the male characters are the representative of respective society, be it Raghu, Gajendra, Virendra or Puroshattam, they all are same just wearing different masks of different names and personalities. On the other hand we find that all the names of female characters are taken from the name of Sita ji, be it Vaidehi, Maithili, Janki or Ramdulari, they all are the embodiment of modern Sita ji. Their names are symbolic, they represent the aspects of Sita ji, but they declined to give any Agni- Pariksha like ancient Sita ji.

They raised their voice against the unjust, Vaidehi raised voice against Raghu's abusive behavior and left him, she met another girl named Maithili, who was getting married to a man who was just a puppet in the hands of his greedy father, they demands for more and more dowry, she revolt against this unjust and called off her marriage publicly and saved her respect despite of so many obstacles. Later we met Janki who is an artist; she was also

accused by her lover and lusted by her theatre director Puroshottam, who creates misunderstanding between Janki and her lover. But Janki did not bend to such fickle minded people and declined to perform the very scene of agni- pariksha in Ramayana. She became the victim of furious audience's anger and lost her child due to miscarriage. She forced us to think about the reality that what had happened if Sita ji might have declined for agni-pariksha, because it was not just a matter to prove her purity, but a matter of saving the fake honor of the society. Do we ever realize why only she was forced to give such exam? What happened to her if she had declined to fulfill the wishes of this fickle minded society?

Same thing happens with Ramdulari, who works on her own conditions, she bravely opposes the villagers when they tried to kill a girl child, she tries to educate the women and make them independent against the wishes of their husbands. She has been portrayed such a strong women that she raised her voice against corrupt and dishonest leader Gajendra and Virendra. She even saves Vaidehi from lusted Virendra too, but very soon she got a brutal punishment ever, she was gang raped by Gajendra and Virendra with their people.

In the last part we find a consolation when Vaidehi exposed Gajendra in front of crowd and he got punishment, at the same time Raghu also realized his mistake and take back his efforts to force Vaidehi to come with him. Here we find that Vaidehi wins the battle of her honor. But this battle is not of only a single woman rather it is a battle of every woman to get what she deserves.

All the woman characters can be taken as modern Sita ji, who declined to act like a puppets in the hands of this society. They suffered severely but in the last they get saved their honor. Ancient Sita ji saved her honor by fulfilling the wishes of society but modern women revolt against the unjust and won their battle of justice. They fought against the evils of society, Vaidehi stands for her own identity, her own rights. She wanted to get a respected life; she was the first who raised her voice against patriarchy. She ultimately proved that it's her life, and she will live her life at her own conditions. Maitheli, revolted against another evil of society that is dowry, she called off her own marriage because she doesn't wanted herself to be trapped in the clutches of greed of her in-laws. It is really difficult for a girl to take such a bold decision but she did it and saved the honor of his father too, though she was criticized earlier but later people admitted that she was right. Janki took the boldest step by not accepting the stereotyped role of female. She declined to give any kind of agni-pariksha and asked to the people, why it is only a woman who gives such sacrifices and exams? She was

not conventional. Her thoughts were rebel kind of, and she suffered a lot. During the act of Ramayana when she declined to give pariksha, people became furious and she was beaten furiously, she lost her child and almost lost her sanity of mind also. On the one side we worship goddesses and on the other side a female is beaten brutally by the people of our so called ideal society. Later in her life she became a popular artist. Last character is Ramdulari who was burnt alive by local goons, because she did not work according to their wishes. She acts like a social worker there and works for the welfare of the poor people. She saved many girls child and educates them just to make them independent. She was fearless and fought against the injustice till the last moment of her life. She was killed brutally by the goons but she did not surrender before their evil plans. In the last she got justice when Gajendra was exposed by Vaidehi.

On the other hand we have another movie Parched which also deals with the struggle of women in Indian society. Parched is the story of four women in a desert village of Rajasthan, India. The village and the society are plagued by several social evils, age-old traditions and practices of patriarchy, child marriage, dowry, marital rapes and physical and mental abuse.

Rani (Tannishtha Chatterjee) is a widow struggling to support her old mother-in-law and teenage son, Gulab (Riddhi Sen). Following village customs, Rani marries Gulab off to a child bride by paying a hefty sum to the bride's family. Meanwhile, Gulab is disrespectful, rebellious, and prefers to loiter with a gang of spoilt friends, and spend time with sex workers. Janki (Lehar Khan), the child bride, hopes to stop the marriage by chopping off her hair but is still forced into the relation. Lajjo (Radhika Apte) lives in the same village as Rani, and is a close friend and aid in Rani's struggles. Lajjo is in an abusive marriage with an alcoholic husband, Manoj (Mahesh Balraj). Having failed to conceive, Lajjo is mocked for being infertile and therefore worthless in the eyes of her husband and society. The fourth woman is Bijli (Surveen Chawla), an erotic dancer in a travelling entertainment company. She is eye candy for the men in the village and doubles as a sex worker. Because of her profession, Bijli is ridiculed in the day and not welcomed at auspicious events. Bijli is a close friend and advisor to both Rani and Lajjo.

The movie begins with Rani and Lajjo visiting another village to see Janki and fix a price for her dowry. Meanwhile, Gulab is seen loitering around a bus stop with his friends. He chases and teases an educated woman, until her husband, Kishan (Sumeet Vyas) approaches. Gulab

and his friends comment that it is inappropriate for a woman to travel alone and look at them directly in the eye. While at Janki's house, Rani receives calls on a cell phone bought for her by Gulab. The anonymous caller started off as a wrong number but now consistently tries to charm her. Although Rani is excited by being approached by a man, her happiness wanes when she realizes that her status as a widow may push him away. Later, at the Gram Panchayat, the village participates in solving local issues. The first issue is of a girl named Champa (Sayani Gupta) who ran away from her husband and tried to return to her parents. The Panchayat forces her to return despite her revelation that her husband's male family members all rape her. Kishan and his wife try intervening but are ridiculed for their progressive opinions and Kishan's marriage to an educated, working woman from Manipur.

Kishan is a forward thinking local entrepreneur and employs women in the village for handicrafts and handloom jobs. Both Rani and Lajjo, among other women in the village, work for Kishan and are proud of the money they make from their hard work. In another matter at the Panchayat, the women collectively ask for a satellite dish TV connection. They say that it will alleviate the women's boredom and also stop the men from visiting erotic dance shows. Their demand was turned down previously by the panchayat elders, giving the reason that women of village will be corrupted by the liberal images on the television and also the lack of finances. The women reveal that Kishan has secured a large contract for their handicrafts and so they are prepared to save money for the installation of the satellite and televisions. The elders reluctantly agree and this angers some men in the village, including Gulab, who start to resent Kishan for trying to liberate the women.

The conservative and patriarchal village men are seen to be constantly visiting Bijli. She has been increasingly turning down offers for sex work which irks her boss, who threatens to replace her with a new girl Rekha (Tanya Sachdeva), who is much younger than her. Lajjo is repeatedly abused and raped by her husband and blamed for being infertile. Gulab's marriage to Janki pushes him deeper into the darker areas of loitering and prostitutes, and he is later kidnapped for not paying a prostitute in the nearby city. A distraught Rani approaches Kishan and takes out a loan in order to save Gulab, pushing her further into debt. Gulab continues down his path of destruction and self entitlement, and together with his friends, take revenge on Kishan. First they destroy his handicraft goods, and later on they beat him half to death, which makes Kishan and his wife to leave the village. Janki struggles in the marriage and is repeatedly beaten by Gulab.

Frustrated, Bijli takes her employers car, picks up Rani, Lajjo and Janki, and visit a local fort where they get a chance to talk freely. Lajjo realizes that her inability to give birth might also be just her husband's inability. In an experiment, Lajjo has sex with Bijli's lover (Adil Hussain) and becomes pregnant. Bijli returns to the company to find that her dancing spot has been given to Rekha. She resorts to engaging in traumatic rough sex with multiple men in order to make money.

Rani discovers that her last bit of savings has been stolen and blames Janki. Later that night, Janki questions Gulab about the money, and he begins to beat her. Rani stops and confronts him, and Gulab angrily walks away, saying that he intends to leave the women to fend for themselves. The next day, Rani sells her house and pays off her debts. She relieves Janki of her marriage, allowing her to reunite with her childhood love Rajesh and asking her to continue with her studies. Lajjo informs Manoj of her pregnancy and he begins to beat her, after which she realizes that he is aware of his impotency. Manoj begins to savagely attack Lajjo, and Rani tries to stop him. As Rani witnesses, Manoj falls on fire and is burnt alive. Rani, Lajjo and Bijli together finally run away from the village in search for a better life, away from all the misery of customs, traditions and patriarchy. Here also we find these women in the clutches of cruel male dominated society. Through this film the some burning issues were raised like, dowry, child marriage, domestic violence mental and sexual harassment. Each character suffered in some way and ultimately they choose the path of revolt. Such exploitation and revolt are not something new to this society. We all are aware of it and it takes place in our day to day life.

Literature is also not unaffected by this plight of women, it also reflects the agony of females. Such exploitation can be easily seen in our society as well in our literary works. There are many female writers who portrayed their struggle against society, some of them are: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapoor, Arundhati Roy etc. In their respected works they have discussed all the issues, and problems faced by women in our society. I would like to give a reference of Anita Desai first, she is one of the contemporary writers of Indian English literature. Her novels , with a touch of feminist concern, portray various issues like failed marriage relationships, which often leads alienation and loneliness of the female characters. Her novel like, *Cry of the Peacock*, *Where shall we go this Summer*, *Voices in the city*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* etc. deal with the theme of marital disharmony and suffering of women.

Another important writer is Shashi Deshpande. She minutely delineates some modern educated women characters who suffer indescribably the distress and the contradictions of the minds of our society. She shows that in post colonial India , Indian educated women suffer a lot because of the strong opposition between the old Indian traditions, norms and values of life and overwhelming impact of the exposure to the western lifestyle. They are trying to look at life in their own ways. This conflict creates a kind of tension and dilemma in the minds of educated Indian women, who finally emerge as champions of their rights and empowerment. Her works like *That Long Silence*, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *Come Up and Be Dead* etc. deal with the struggle of women and their feministic approach. Further we can talk about Jhumpa Lahiri , another female writer of Indian literature who gave space to women and their problems in her works. Her selected works like *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth* and *The Lowland*, highlight patriarchal dominance, ideological pressures, gender inequality, gender discrimination, power relations, sexism, stereotyping, emancipation, sexuality, sacrifice, tolerance, acceptance, social and psychic pressures, forgiveness, courage, protection, possessiveness, love, care etc.. last but not the least I would like to give the reference of Arundhati Roy, her novel *The God of Small Things* portrays the suffering of female characters. In this novel also we find gender discrimination, violence, mental and physical harassment of women, especially of Ammu. We find a struggle against patriarchal society who never allows women to live their life according to their own ways.

After analyzing all the literary and cinematic works mentioned above, we can notice similarities between both the fields. The ways are different but both are talking about the same issue and problem, they both are trying to raise voice against these evils (child marriage, dowry domestic violence, sexual and mental harassment, suppression of women's rights etc.) of society. Through this cinematic technique we are able to portray suffering of women in more exact and real way. They are trying to make women aware of their rights and trying to make them understand their real problems. Literature and cinema both are giving enough space to women and their revolt against injustice and forced patriarchy. The main aim of such works and movies is to reform the condition of women in India, so that they can understand the real cause of their suffering and gather some courage to revolt against such evils against them. We can abolish such evils from our society only by awareness and taking a tough stand against the dominion of this patriarchal society. To some extent they have understood the fact that they are weak no more, they are able to stand alone , that they also

deserves equality that's why they are emerging as exponents of empowerment.

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