



Religion as Customary Tool in Creating Women Centric Roles in the Society through Cross-Boundary Cinema From India and Pakistan.

Chandan Prasad Jena

Lecturer In English

Nachuni Mahavidyalaya, Khordha, India

Abstract: Indian Subcontinent narrates a different tale of gender identity. Undivided India and the societal customs and traditions since the post partition scene plays a pivotal in studying about India as a whole, with Pakistan, India and Bangladesh being still connected by an invisible thread of culture and customs. A culture nurtured under the aegis of the religious mythologies promoting male gods in superior positions, culminated a society adulated in a dominant male ego with an imbalance in gender identity. A consensus that a woman still needs the protection of a husband and a family to survive in this society is a prominent psyche. The recent days, films have become a medium to narrativize such approaches and have well documented the portrayal of the angst of the Indian Subcontinent Women. In most of the movies, women are given a second-tier status; often stereotyped as 'objects' and they are characterized as inferior. However, there are certain movies that serve as the mouthpiece for women cause, and have focused in echoing their voice. The new trend of modern cinema also represents a sexual revolution for the women, who have finally come out to talk explicitly about their sexuality, their desires and concerns. This paper will try to analyze how religion, customs and patriarchy move as a single dominant force in the two selected movies (Bol and Parched) to highlight the role of patriarchy and religion that creates a structure of cultural violence against women. A sense of feminist consciousness pitted against dogmatic patriarchal society drives the narratives of these films. The scope of further research on this topic opens up due to encompassing of the visual narratives of India and Pakistan in a single paper.

Keywords - Gender inequality, Religion, Sexuality, Visual Narratives, Patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

Articulations of patriarchy vary in different cultures and religions. Nevertheless, culture and religion provides privilege to 'masculinities' while subordinating 'femininities'. Additionally, culture and religion rely on specific masculinities and femininities to translate themselves, more often into violence to establish the image of prominence. Columnist Katha Politt has suggested in 'Free Inquiry' (a publication of the Council for Secular Humanism) that "...religion is the original rule book of patriarchy" (Free Inquiry, 27-31). All organized religion propagates the idea of male supremacy. They portray women as physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually inferior to men. The latter get special rights and privileges on the account of being 'naturally' superior to their female counterparts. Religion and culture are not homogeneous ideas but emerge from social, political and economic contexts. They exist in specific historical time and geographies, and they are also constantly changing. One of the most important features of both religion and culture are that they are both linked to power and are described and defined by people in power and because of patriarchy; the people in power are often men. Both religion and culture reflect patriarchies and are used to maintain patriarchal structures. Patriarchy brings to the forefront many theoretical questions regarding the position of women in religion at multiple locations and have evolved through integration of complex configurations of culture and power. The cause of women's oppression has been recognized to have originated from dominant patriarchal cultural practices in society and family institutions (Kandiyoti, 2015). Women in general, have always been associated with domesticity. Most parents have always taught their daughters about how to be an obedient daughter, a helpful sister, a devoted wife, a caring mother and a good daughter-in-law, but seldom coached them to stand up for their rights. Patriarchy and religion work as a vehicle for coercing women to accept gender oppression through religio-mythological explanation, in order to maintain the cohesion of, the male-dominated social system in India. there are actually no clear cuts to distinguish which values belong to culture and which belong to religion for they are entrenched in the cultural system (Scupin, 2012). This is because the combination of both has developed a value system which consists of interconnected rules, norms, traditions as well as restrictions, teaching and philosophy (Scupin, 2012). Interestingly, the community of each society has shaped a society's religious view, in which society's culture has been fitted in to suit the society (Scupin, 2012); these are being put into practice. Patriarchy itself is a culture as it has been passed down through generations (Kandiyoti, 2015). To examine the nexus, the aforementioned concept requires an exploration of the mythology, history, geography and cultural boundaries which provides the groundwork for understanding the phenomena. Drawing references from Simone De Beauvoir who saw religion as exploiting and oppressing women (The Second Sex, 1949). She argued that religious faiths encouraged women to be meek, to put up with inequality, exploitation and suffering and doing

so will bring rewards in the afterlife. Religion serves as one of the greatest identity markers of communities across the globe. It plays a decisive role along with other social factors such as caste, class and ethnicity in the construction of gender identity. The interplay of gender and religion is a key factor in the politics of social definition, in the formation of social space and in the shaping of women's consciousness. Further, it is noted that religion matters not only for cultural attitudes but for the opportunities and constraints on women's lives. This is more so because women who are religious tend to assimilate and observe dogmatically the gendered prescriptions of religious traditions, beliefs and practices in an uncritical manner without being conscious of its detrimental effects on their growth as persons. The inter-sectionality of religion with gender is very evident in countries like India and Pakistan where there is a high sensitivity towards religion. In such setup women continue to be loyal in upholding belief systems and pious practices. As far as Christianity is concerned, the church services in both the urban and the rural setting continue to be well attended, with women making up the majority of the faithful at these services. Even within the broader framework of Hinduism, women are the mainstream temple-goers and transmitters of tradition. In such a 'religious' setting, women take pride in being the loyal transmitters of piety and religious faith, and, so, the danger lies in their blindness to the tactics of patriarchy that uses their 'religiousness' to keep them subjugated and well contained within the restricted spaces allotted to them. Similarly, in Islam women though given a superior position but adherence to religious doctrines makes them subjects of the evils of patriarchy. Like in Islam, the right to instantaneous and unilateral divorce is enjoyed only by men practiced in Indian subcontinent, though this right has been contested, politicized and now reforms have been made accordingly. This tendency of 'patronising' and 'guiding' is not restricted to Islam.

Almost all religion and their holy texts advocate domination of females by males and advertise the same as something that is actually beneficial for the former. According to Genesis (3:16), God told Eve that '...the husband will rule over you'. This was after Adam and Eve consumed the 'forbidden fruit'; a folly for which Eve was categorically held responsible. This is largely taken to define that God entrusted men with the task to ensure that women do not make such foolish mistakes as per the mythology of Abrahamic religions again. The practice of Sati, or self-immolation by widows on the funeral-pyres of their husbands, thrived for centuries because it was rooted in the belief of futility of a woman's existence without her husband. In almost all organized religions, restrictions exist over a woman's choices over her body, sexuality, lifestyle, clothes, and just about everything. Sindoor and Mangalsutra, Hijab and Naqab are all religiously-endorsed tools for showcasing and implying 'sexual exclusivity' of women. This religiously-endorsed patriarchy is deeply seeped into the common psyche and behaviour. We find that the Supreme God in all religions is always envisioned as a male. Same goes with scriptures which are mostly written and interpreted by men who tweak and translate them to suit their own vision of the desirable social-order and preferable gender-dynamics in the same. Orthodox Catholicism forbids women from becoming priests simply because a priest essentially plays the part of Christ and the latter happens to be a male. Also, as per Christian traditions, since Jesus selected only male apostles and did not ordain women, the inclusion of women is not considered desirable. Hence the exclusion of women from priesthood continues. In Islam, women cannot lead prayers as 'imams' in mosques and in mixed gatherings. But women can lead prayers in women-only gatherings as is the general pattern in South Asia, thereby, conforming to the policy of segregation as advocated by the Holy Scriptures. Women priests in Hindu temples are extremely rare because women are 'biologically' unfit for the job as menstruating women are deemed impure and unfit for 'sacred' duties pertaining to God. This is also the reason why women are denied entry to places of worship when they are menstruating. Through generations, women are conditioned to not only accept, but also gladly embrace, the status of a second-class citizen as assigned to them by their respective belief-system. Women are reduced to socially, economically and spiritually inferior beings whose primary role is procreation. Their natural realm is the home and their duty is that of a home-maker. Such blatant discrimination can only be normalized and ingrained in the common psyche by evoking the name of God.

But it is pertinent to note that most of the organized religions of today were not discriminatory to begin with. In fact many scholars contend that religions were not patriarchal in the early stages of organized life. It is believed that early religions, or more appropriately worship, centered on female Goddesses during prehistoric times as for example, Mother Earth was worshipped in the Vedic times. Women seemed to be revered as the Creator of life during this period, before patriarchy took hold of the narrative and edged out what appears to be, if not matriarchal, then at least an egalitarian belief-structure.

Early Hinduism, too, is believed to be egalitarian. Chapter 10 of the Rig-Veda expounded the idea of feminine energy behind the creation of the universe. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions existing in the world and it is unified with the Indian culture (Rig Veda). It originated around the Indus Valley, India. Hindus believe in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth which is dictated by Karma (Rig Veda). In the beginning, during the Vedic years, women had equal rights as men and in fact, many Hindu deities are female, worshiped by all Hindus. Men in Hinduism are expected to care for the women in their life with love and respect, provide them shelter and protect them from any harm. It also claims that "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased. Where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards." (The Law of Manu). With the advent of Islam, women came to enjoy a kind of autonomy that was unheard of in the pre-Islamic Arab. In pre-Islamic Arab women were viewed as objects and were constantly humiliated. Karen Armstrong in her book *Islam: A Short History* has pointed out that 'the women of the first Ummah in Medina took full part in the public life.' (Karen, 32). It was probably before men moulded the religion to suit their patriarchal leanings. It seems that eventually every religion or organized belief-system was hijacked by vested interests to propagate their own patriarchal agenda.

Literature Review

Steeves and Smith (1987) write that there is excessive representation of women in entertainment programs. Feminist socialists argue that class and gender are more discussed issues on media. Zoonen (1992) analyzed that people had made the concept that technologically men and women should be dealt differently. The main objective of liberal feminism was to provide much access and recognition to women. Liberal feminism also took men and women equal in capacity.

According to Zoonen critics had the point that men were more politically and rationally strong, while woman were more personal, emotional and inclined to nurture so they could not be deal

equally. Acker (1987) in his study focuses on three theoretical frameworks of feminist theory. He examines that while studying gender liberal feminism, feminists' stresses on concept of equal opportunities sex, roles and their discrimination; they focus to change the practice of socialization. Critics say those liberal researchers are unable to tackle power and patriarchy in a right way. Socialist researchers focus on gender based behavior palters of individuals. Yet they lack empirical foundation. Radical feminist stresses on male monopolization of knowledge. Critics say that there are so many weaknesses in methods in radical feminist theory. Realism is a term established in nineteenth century focusing to portray life as it really was (Lapslay 1988). This focus is on ordinary life. Film is the medium which can present direct and true presentation of the realism by the characters and their environment. Social issues are addressed through realism films, as realism produces realism. And while producing realism film has to maintain both seamless and aesthetic motivated realism.

Mohanram (1996) says that tradition of imperialism shows that a libertarian woman is the extract of decolonized nation. And history also explores the concept of feminism in international frame.

Humm (1997) writes that since last two decades, feminist theory has got much popularity as a critical analysis. The writer discusses a number of feminist issues and suggests an original film analysis. Contemporary film, aesthetic visuals and feminism are the concerned discussed contents by Humm. Reproduction, pornography and the gaze, autobiography and literary theory, postmodernism, black feminism are the related questions to feminism.

Thornham (2000) reveals that the feminine Mystique the origin of feminist works in mass communication. This was based on fundamental American society. Writer further, adds that media deleterious role models. Females are always defining in term of men means as sex object or they are used in the context of the family means as mothers or wives.

Women in Realistic Cinema

Film is a very important constituent of media, which can bring change in society. This in addition to being the best source of entertainment is also used for information, education and as well as a tool of propaganda to make opinion or to converse the world opinion. Every movie in the world is made on some ideology shown as reality (Buckland 2011). Realistic cinema is different from popular cinema in the way that it takes inspiration for its subjects from real life situations and existing circumstances in the society. Though, it may apparently fall in the realm of popular cinema, its approach and treatment of characters is more convincing than popular

cinema. It is interesting to examine that some films from this brand of cinema is becoming popular among audiences. This type of cinema combines popular appeal and critical acclaim. Movies like Black Friday (2004), Udaan (2010), No One Killed Jessica (2011), Once Upon a Time in Mumbai (2010), Akrosh (2010) etc., can be listed under this category. For the purpose of specificity and clarity, I have selected two movies Bol (2011) and Parched (2016) to analyse the context. The selected movies are associated with gritty realism of the society.

Pakistani film industry has produced hundreds of remarkable movies. It was considered as the shining industry till 80s. In Pakistan an average of eighty films are produced per year. Very less information is being spread regarding this industry in the world (Gazdar, 1997). Yet in the 21 st century there was a total collapse of the Pakistan film Industry (Rodriguez, 2009). Then in 2011, after a long time audience and cinema theaters of Pakistan got a movie plotted on so many social issues like extremism, male chauvinism, feminism, rights and status of woman, religion, illiteracy, culture, concept of prostitution, patriarchy and corruption. Bol was a commercial success in Pakistan with a mixed response from Indian audiences also. It is a social drama film written, directed and produced by Shoaib Mansoor. On the backdrop it who migrated to Pakistan during the Partition. It narrated a tale of the family going through financial difficulties caused by too many children and changing times. The plot revolves around the father's desire to have a son and his rejection of his existing intersex child. Son leading the family legacy is one of the major social stigma which was portrayed by the projection of the psyche of the antagonist, "Sons are the flag-bearers of family legacy." (Hakim Sahab)

Bol is a building situated on the plot of patriarchal paradigm with a keen touch of religion. As Rizvi (2011) who has a complete overlook over the Pakistani cinema writes that in former Pakistani cinema the image of females was shy, submissive, obedient and that of a confused one. Now this trend is totally changed by bold, beautiful, confident and strong women who can argue too. Mansoor has employed the tried and tested formula of Flashback technique in this movie. The prime narrative of the movie lays emphasis on the plight of those that exist on the margins of a patriarchal society while laying bare the gender inequities that are perpetuated by religiously imposed values and taboos.

The film starts by showing the protagonist, Zainab who about to be hanged for her crime against humanity. She is standing at the hanging deck yet she is telling her story to media to bring change in the society. The entire narrative rolls on a flashback technique. The narrative proceeds

with a middle-aged, morally upright traditional medicine man named Manzar Hakim Sahab (practitioner of Unani medicine). The Hakim is prone to frequent fits of rage as he grapples with a dwindling practice and taxing poverty, who treats his wife and daughters with minimal respect. Hakeem Sahab is the character who epitomizes the concept of patriarchal paradigm and male chauvinism. His gestures, ideologies language and authoritarian attitude all are projecting the ideologies of the character strongly. He abuses and humiliates his daughters and wife throughout the movie to present male chauvinism. To present patriarchal ideology, he is shown with a complete control over his family. Ham sari bannon ko panchwi kay baad ghar m bitha dia giya tha shows how a girl child has been portrayed in the movie. ("We all sisters were not send school and kept at home after fifth standard") This is a complete reflection of control over all rights of family members especially females. The father does not allow his daughters to go to higher school. In patriarchal family father is taking decisions about the educational future of his daughters. Even they want to study more but father does not send them school after fifth standard. Contrary to the narrative of the movie, "Islam pays utmost importance to education of women" (Naik, 23). He is taking all the decisions from birth to death. On the contrary his eldest daughter Zainab stands up to her oppressive patriarch father and also against the prevailing social practises. No doubt she gets scolded and reprimanded by the self proclaimed patriarch. Zainab was married to a guy who keeps harassing her for not giving birth to a child. Hence, she raises her voice and comes back to her father's house. Zainab is the symbol of liberal feminism challenging patriarchal paradigm and normative gender roles. Liberal feminism is of the view to give reproductive rights to women and the language, gestures, attitudes and expressions used by Zainab project liberal feminism. Her mother has to deliver a baby every year as her father wants a boy. At last Mrs. Hakeem gives birth to a baby who is not a girl but shockingly he is born as an eunuch. Hakeem Sahab hates the baby, yet all the family members love him. Saifullah, is really a girl trapped in a boy's body. Hidden from the public eye, his sexual inclination makes him a subject for ridicule and exploitation in a society. Non-performance of gender roles make people look down upon at anyone who does not conform and confront to dominant socio-religious norms. To her surprise, though aware about Saifulla, Zainab sees Saifi dressed in women's clothes and gets very disturbed. Saifi's gender identity becomes unacceptable to his father because his gender identity is considered to bring shame to the family. In an Asian society in lower middle class mostly fathers have the same gestures as presented by Saifi. He convinces her

sister Zainab that it is not hard to be a man. There is only need to uplift eyebrows, make the voice heavy. The man is the person who snubs his family on tiny things and quarrels with them. The sketch of the father in a practical family is an authoritarian, strict, quarreling and harsh person. An enigmatic neighbour, Mustafa, a guitar-strumming musician who is studying to be a doctor and is in love with Ayesha, another of the Hakim Saab's many daughters, finds Saifi a job as a banner painter, but with terribly tragic consequences of harassment as Saifi goes missing and is subsequently raped. Then a dialogue by Hakim Sahab, 'Maine usko kaha kaha nahi dhunda...Khuda karein who marr gaya ho' (I have been searching for him... I hope he is dead') explains the exact emotions that he has for Saifi. After this incident another intersex, finds him and takes him home. But as ill luck would have it Hakim overhears Saifi telling his mother and Zainab what happened. Later on, when everybody is asleep, Hakim suffocates Saifi to death with a plastic bag owing to the shame Shafi brought to his name. It was not much of a shock then that Saifi was subsequently murdered by him, thereby reinstating that any gender identity which is a deterrent to the societal standards, poses a threat to the normative norms of the society. Now to bribe the police officer for keeping it a secret Hakim is forced to take money out of the Masjid funds. When the masjid asks for money Hakim is forced to go to Saqa's house to get it. Teaching children is not giving him enough money to repay the funds, so Saqa gives him another option to marry and have a baby with Meena, Saqa's oldest daughter. Saqa tells him that it is the men who decide the sex of the baby further inserting the tone of patriarchy.

Then we witness how Zainab gets Ayesha and Mustafa married since Hakim found another man with whom he wanted to get Ayesha married. "The Prophet (S.A.W.) invalidated the marriage to be solemnized against the girl's consent." (Naik, 18) She knows that she has to face consequences of this act. So as her father enters home she comes forward and asks the way by whom he would like to torture her. She offers her father either to bring a stick or kerosene oil and a match stick to burn her. It shows that Zainab is fully aware about the authoritarian and cruel reaction of her father. She has taken a very bold step without the concern of her father so she has to suffer. Simultaneously, Hakim marries Meena. Meena has her baby, and it is a girl meaning Saqa gets to keep it as Hakim wanted a boy child. Hakim begs Meena to give him the baby so that the child does not have to face a horrible future of prostitution and suffering.

Later on, Meena comes to give Hakim's family the baby girl. Hakim's wife screams at him on coming to know about the reality. She tells the kids what happened, and Zainab wants to leave

the house and move somewhere else to start a new life.

Then we have, Saqa coming to take Meena's daughter so Hakim tries to kill the daughter to protect her from a horrible dark future. But he is killed by Zainab who hides the baby. Zainab

tells Saqa that Hakim killed the baby and threw her out somewhere and she killed Hakim. It was for this crime that she has been sentenced the death penalty.

Coming to real time, a reporter tries to prove that she is innocent but to no avail. Zainab is hanged but leaves behind a question 'If killing is a sin, why is giving birth without family planning not a sin?' which makes everyone ponder upon the statement challenging the patriarchal paradigm.

Finally she is hanged.

The roots of *Bol* are rooted firmly in socio-real sphere of the Indian subcontinent's contemporary reality with Pakistan being the heart in consonance with the socio-religious society driven by patriarchy. The narrative speaks that religion, custom and patriarchy operate in parallel but somewhere have the common origin. There are many instances of empowered gender performance and discrimination by patriarchy which are highlighted in the film. The film was rightfully a part of The Pakistan Initiatives for Mothers and Newborn (PAIMAN), because of its element of maternal health. "Bol is Bold... So bold that some will find it hard to confess that they have seen it" (www.bolthemovie.com) "Men in Islam are one degree higher than women in responsibility, not in superiority." (Naik, 19)

The next movie *Parched* (2016), by debutant director Leena Yadav who had started her career in the television industry. 'Parched' is a story about four ordinary women Rani, Lajjo, Bijli and Janaki set in a parched village of Rajasthan. Each of them leads a parched life within the set societal boundaries conforming to religious customs. The social practice force them to lead a life of a widow, a barren woman, an erotic dancer and a child bride respectively. All of them were tired of the struggles in their life. Rani is a widow, who was once battered by her husband. As the sole breadwinner of her family, she weaved thin blankets to earn an income. Living in poverty in a small mud hut with her son, Gulab and old mother-in-law, Rani worked hard to save dowry money to get her son a bride. Her son was a spoilt brat who spent her income wastefully. Rani thought that by being married off to a beautiful girl, Gulab would become a responsible person and would start earning for the family. In the Indian culture, men are believed to become responsible when they are married. Rani's mind set shows how she was conditioned

to think and react as her upbringing and culture had shaped her mind-set. This encapsulates the notion that claims "...masculinity and femininity are constructed by society." (Flax, 2013). However, things did not turn out as planned. Gulab's wife, Janaki, had her hair cut short before the wedding, causing her to look boyish. As Janaki's veil fell off her head exposing her short hair in the wedding bus, Gulab became embarrassed as his friends laughed joyfully. He hated his newly wedded wife and Rani's plan failed. Enraged, Gulab would hit and rape his wife whenever he came home. Gulab's reaction and behaviour corresponds to that of typical patriarchal men; asserting power and dominance over women (Kandiyoti, 2015). The sound of the beatings and the pain enduring screams reminded Rani of her own marital rapes. The small partition in the mud hut echoed the abusive noise and in the mornings, Janaki would emerge with bruises and limped as she walks. Rani was emotionally disturbed to see the flashback of her youth; a psychological agony after the physical torture.

Janaki was going to school before walking into the forced marriage which bestowed her parents a substantial dowry for her beauty. Forced marriages in return of hefty dowries have been a part of the Indian culture. Many poor parents often resort to marry off their daughters fast in return of dowry- a temporary financial relief. At the same time, they reduce the number of mouths to be fed (Kandiyoti, 2015). The inability of her school lover to pay the high dowry left her with no choice but to cut her lustrous hair short as a means to be rejected by the groom's mother. This brave act of Janaki shows that she was not passive and was intelligent to craft a plan to jeopardize her own wedding (Flax, 2013). Nevertheless, her plan did not work as Rani still took Janaki back as her daughter-in-law. Janaki was devastated with her new life as she was constantly hit and raped. The men in the movie are obstinate, arrogant and control the women like slaves who have no role at all in their lives and are seen as nothing more than a mere commodity. Gulab, son of Rani is aggressive and power-hungry who tries to show off his manliness in front of his friends. He tries to prove his masculinity by indulging in sex showing his friends that he can do it. He is infuriated to see his bride with short hair. He believes that as a husband his only duty is to perform 'the act' and that act is having physical relationship with his wife. He also abuses his wife as a way of showing his power and control over her. She endured the pain silently by herself, yet never mentioned returning to the biological parents. Janaki's reaction of enduring the abuse reflects the submissiveness of a patriarchal woman (Kandiyoti, 2015). Janaki's situation validates how different domains which weigh different customs and

traditions cause hurdles to women in differing circumstances (Fraser & Nicholson, 2013).

As a mother-in-law, Rani did abuse Janaki verbally and physically. She always blamed Janaki to be the source of the son's anger and even hit her twice. Once, she lost her saving and accused Janaki to be the thief. In a separate occurrence, she saw Janaki picking up books left by her lover and accused her to be an unfaithful wife. Rani's beatings and accusations reflect how certain domains empower women to be in control (Flax, 2013). Rani as the mother-in-law, was in

a position to assert power over Janaki, as it is a part of the cultural practice. Conversely, besides being young and submissive, Janaki was also honest and brave. Janaki defended herself on both occasions mentioned above. In the first incident, Janaki confronted Gulab, the actual thief, who later battered her badly. In the second incident, Janaki told Rani the truth about her love story which led to her hair cutting incident. Listening to Janaki's story, Rani felt sorry for her young daughter-in-law. Janaki's reactions to both occasions dignify her self-esteem. She may submit to abuse as her culture permits such acts to be imposed on her, yet she chose to rebel when alleged with false accusations. Women struggle in that village where forced child marriages, in-family rape, abusive and alcoholic men, the so-called patriarchy is still rampant. The movie staged Rani to free her daughter-in-law Janaki from the marriage by allowing her to flee with her lover. Rani's reaction again signifies that certain domains asserts woman with power (Flax, 2013). Rani's act of going against the culture also proves that Rani wanted to be relieved from the burden of reliving her own misery and allow justice for a young bride.

Lajjo was a friend of Rani's. Married to Manoj, an abusive man, her childless state caused her to feel incomplete. In patriarchal culture, a woman is worthy only when she is fertile; yet, a fertile woman only gains respect if she gives birth to sons. (Kandiyoti, 2015). Lajjo too weaved thick blankets to earn her living as her alcoholic husband, was jobless. Almost every night, he would eat his dinner, hit Lajjo for her childless condition then have sex with her. His behaviour is of typical patriarchal men (Kandiyoti, 2015). Similarly, Lajjo surrendered to the oppression despite experiencing the repetitive pattern as her culture chained her to remain in the marriage as a patriarchal woman (Kandiyoti, 2015). Returning to her parents' house was never an option and being childless has conditioned her to accept the oppression as her fate. Rani and Lajjo find comfort in each other's company as they have somewhat same story. When Lajjo informed her husband about her pregnancy, he was furious. Lajjo actually conceived after having a sexual intercourse arranged by her friend Bijli, a prostitute, with one of her former clients.

Having doubted her husband's potency and the strong urge to be a mother, Lajjo agreed to the secret sex arrangement to be a complete woman. Upon receiving the pregnancy news, Manoj stormed in anger and accused her to have committed adultery. Lajjo's denial claiming the child to be Manoj's further enraged him who then revealed that he was actually impotent. During the uproar, Manoj fell near the stove and his clothes caught fire. Lajjo stopped Rani from helping and let Manoj as well as their mud house burn down in ashes.

Lajjo's decisions of her life greatly evolved around her culture. In the Indian culture, a woman is complete when she has a child. Thus she ventured for an 'outsourced pregnancy'. A woman who has sexual affair with another man is usually abandoned by her husband as she is considered to be immoral. Hence she denied the allegation of adultery. Rationally, saving her husband from fire would allow him to inform the society of her sinful deeds. Having her husband die in the fire would bury her sinful deeds. Besides, it was an accident which brought sweet revenge for all the emotional and psychological tortures she suffered living as an infertile woman. Therefore, it can be concluded that Lajjo left her husband to perish in the fire to end her misery and at the same time to save the life of her unborn child.

Bijli, an erotic dancer and a prostitute is a common friend of Rani and Lajjo and shares her experience of her adventures with men as well as her sexual escapades. She happens to be the most flamboyant of the trio, is entirely dependent on the men to assert herself, yet is aware that youth will never be on her side.

On the contrary Kishan, a local entrepreneur is shown as a savior to the women folk of the village as he helps the village women be self-dependent by teaching them the art of handicrafts. He married an educated Manipuri woman who is impressively able and confident. When she is constantly ogled up and harassed by Gulab, she does not respond in a timid feminine manner as is expected as a passive recipient of the gaze but she stares them down. Gulab and his friends spoil the handicrafts made by the village women as a way of avenging the threat to patriarchy and their superiority. The fact that he could not have free access to Kishan's wife made him agitated and stand up in revolt. The village in the movie resembles a patriarchal set up where men rule and their values are privileged.

The movie ends with Rani and Lajjo leaving the village with their prostitute friend Bijli, in the hope of a new beginning, breaching the customs. Their departure signifies that women are not all passive as some are capable of limiting oppression (Flax, 2013). They have scarified and tolerated so much, yet the men in their lives never appreciated them. Having each other as a support, they are capable of making a choice for themselves. These women are swept by the tide of exploitation by being the victim of male domination and patriarchal norms in a social set up that subtly pushes them to adhere to the code of being discreet and docile while serving the men. In "The Second Sex", de Beauvoir has famously written that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman". (Beauvoir 1949) It led the second wave feminists to distinguish, for example, between the word 'female', which specifies biological sex, and the word 'feminine', which describes a social gender role. The women in this village are socially conditioned over the years of dominance to be submissive to men. Women are addressed as girl vending machines who can't keep their legs together. The village promotes age old practice of forced child

marriage. The movie depicts the rural openness around sexuality and how village women talk openly about sex and how there is nothing shameful about a woman's need for sex. "Parched" is a realist film and profoundly feminist too. The director has made an attempt to struck chords with the audience through these women characters, though every spectator interprets it with codes internalized as a result of the social conditioning and socio-religious traditions. Both the movies Bol and Parched have female protagonists who fight it out with the age-old patriarchy but their approaches are different.

Conclusion

This paper titled "Patriarchal Customs in Women Subjugation: A Comparative Study of the Projection in Two Bol and Parched Religion as Customary tool in creating Women Centric Roles in the Society." focuses on celluloid versions of well-known movies. Both movies have depicted how the women are subjugated by their own family members. An attempt has been made to understand the process of transmutation from literature to films with the focus on the portrayal of women protagonists against a patriarchal set up. With the incorporation of popular theories like gender studies, marginalization and post-colonialisation the relationship between films and the plight of women have been studied in parallel to arrive at a rationally viable understanding of the impact and influence of the patriarchal set up on the lives of women with focus on cinemas from two countries, namely India and Pakistan to justify the claim that an empowered woman is the product of cinema and society taken together. Cultural practices and religious teachings have been maneuvered in the venture to keep the female characters consciously and subconsciously under the control of men. The circumstances, in which the

female characters were, have weakened them to endure their surroundings and forced them to embrace oppression as their fate. Conversely, not all women are subscribed to the stereotypical representation of weak and submissive beings. They may go against the tide, should they have some support to be able to escape their misery. Most of the time, the female characters are able to see that they are being oppressed, yet they choose to succumb until being pushed to the edge, before bending the rules or breaking the norms. The movies showed how and when the female characters make choices; whether to endure, to bend or break free from the oppression or oppressors.

REFERENCES

1. Acker, Sandra. "Feminist theory and the study of Gender and Education." *International Review of Education*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1987, pp. 419-435. doi:10.1007/BF00615157.
2. Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: A Short History*. Modern Library, 2000.
3. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Classics, 2015.
4. Buckland, Wasran. "The Reality Film: Theories of Filmic Reality." *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2011, pp. 390-394.
5. Flax, J. (2013). "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.12, no.4, 2013, pp.619-624.
6. Fraser, Nancy, and Linda Nicholson. "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism." *Social Text*, no. 21, 1989, pp. 83-104. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/827810. Accessed 7 January 2021.
7. Gazdar, Mushtaq. *Pakistan Cinema: 1947-1997*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
8. Humm, Maggie. *Feminism and Film*. Indiana University Press, 1997.
9. Kapoor, Leena. "Women in Rig Veda- Lesson drawn for Modern Women." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol. 10, no.4, 2021, pp.08-12.
10. Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Women, Islam and the State." *Middle East Report*, no. 173, 1991, pp. 9-14. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3012623. Accessed 7 Jan 2021 .
11. Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Identity and Its discontents: Women and the nation." *Millennium*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2015, pp. 429-443.
12. Lapsley, Robert and Michael Westlake. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Manchester University Press, 2006.
13. Mohanram. "Indian Feminism in as International Frame." *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol.3, no. 2, 1996, pp. 283-300. doi: 10.1177/097152159600300214.
14. Naik, Zakir. *Rights of Women in Islam – Modern or Outdated?* Adam Publishers, 2011.
15. Pollitt, Katha. "Sexism and Religion: Can the Knot Be Untied?" *Free Inquiry :Women in 15. Secularism*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2013, pp. 149-168.
16. Rizvi, Wajiha Raza. "Visual Pleasure of Pakistani Cinema (1947-2010)." *The International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2014, pp.73-105.
17. Rodriguez, Alex. (2009, November 8). "Lollywood in Collapse". *Los Angeles Times*, 8 November, 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/08/entertainment/ca-lollywood8>
18. Scupin, Raymond. *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective*. Pearson, 2007.
19. Steeves, H. Leslie and Smith, Marilyn Crafton. "Class and Gender in Prime-time Television Entertainment. Observations from a Socialist Perspective." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 11, no.1, 1987, pp. 43-63.
20. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. *The Rig Veda : An Anthology : One Hundred and Eight Hymns*. Penguin Books, 1981.
21. Zoonen, Liesbet Van. "Feminist Theory and Information Technology." *Media Culture and Society*, vol. 14, 1993, pp.9- 29.