

Article

Debjani Halder

**Deconstruction of Motherhood in Indian Parallel Cinema (1950s to 1980s)***'Mother**You're the last refuge.**We, worthless creatures of the world,**Can do nothing.**This world lives**Because of you.**But we've no right**To say this**For we're your abandoned children.'*

----- (Ghatak Ritwik: 1971)

'The feminine' is a construction of patriarchy, based on gender discrimination, which accords priority to males in society, relegating the role of women to secondary status. This

trend was prevalent in the spheres of art and culture. Women are presented in a one-dimensional manner in literature, painting, cinema, and theatre in the gaze of the male. In the early part of the twentieth century, especially the filmmakers, cinematographers and screenplay writers in 'mainstream cinema', presented women as subservient of the patriarchal social system, and ignored their desires, rights, and identities as individuals.'

In the early part of Indian cinema, exclusively from the 1920s to the 1940s, filmmakers like Phalke, Kanjibhai Rathore, Damle and Fatelal endeavoured to preserve national tradition and identity through their films, based on stories from the Puranas, but these films neither addressed contemporary reality nor did they present women in flesh and blood

in the context of that reality. Hindi and Bengali films in the 1920s depicted the pure and the 'divine' image of women modelled on Puranic characters in such films as '*Sukanya Sabitri*' (1920), '*Sati Anasua*' (1922), '*Sati*' (1920) '*Kamale Kamini*' (1924), '*Sabitri Satyaban*' (1924) and others. The films from the 1920s to '30s presented women predominantly as gentle, humble, timid and tolerant as well as some women as vamps in contrast. These were not women in flesh and blood but almost symbolic figures that had nothing to do with reality. In other words, there was a clear division between the 'good woman' and 'bad woman' in the construction of the image of women in Indian cinema of the 1920s. This construction of the 'idealised woman' in terms of patriarchal values was far removed from contemporary reality, and, at the same time, was a hindrance to women establishing their individuality. In the mainstream cinema of the 1920s and '30s, women were eulogised as images of sacred womanhood and motherhood as well. These images were constructed on those of the Puranas, which bestowed on women greatness, possessing supernatural powers. Thus, on the one hand, there was the image of sacred women with supernatural powers, which elevated them to the status of a goddess, and, on the other, there was the image of women who were quarrelsome, depraved and wicked. As a consequence of this arbitrary categorisation fostered by patriarchal values, the truth was the casualty insofar as the reality of women's subordinate position, exploitation and repression remained hidden behind the spectacle in

cinema. This fictitious presentation of women from the male gaze was the instance of women's deprivation in a patriarchal society.

One can cite the example of '*Sunkanya Sabitri*' directed by Kanjibhai Rathore in the 1920s. Ashish Rajadhyaksha marked this film as a milestone in Indian cinema insofar as the director chose Puranic stories whose central character was a woman, along with some technical experimentations. This film later encouraged the choice of women-centric themes in mainstream early Indian cinema. Nonetheless, arguably, leaving beside this impetus to women-centric films, there was no reflection of a woman's individuality in '*Sukanya Sabitri*'. Many of the scenes of this film have been salvaged. In one of the scenes, we see the serpent was sent by Yama, which bites Satyaban. The next scene was the conversations between Yama and Sabitri, intercut with Sabitri's life story, which brought forth the fact that Sabitri had no individuality. Rather, she found the fulfilment of life as a woman in her marriage and married life with Satyaban.



**Figure: 1, *Sukanya Savitri* (1920): Film by Kanji Bhai Rathor**

In the formative years of Indian cinema, women were presented as objects of ridicule. Let us, for example, refer to '*Lankadahan*' (1920) directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. There is no denying the fact that Dadasaheb Phalke, in his characteristic style, gave a cinematic form to Puranic tales, which gained acceptance among the audience as part of Indian tradition. But in these films based on Puranic tales, the technological means he used to portray women's helplessness and panic-driven bewilderment turned women into objects of ridicule, undermining, in many cases, their individuality. '*Lankadahan*' is a case in point, where Phalke used top shots of women fainting or struggling to keep afloat in waterbodies in fear of Hanuman to portray the panic-stricken image of the women of Lanka, which underscores the inferior and helpless status of women before the heroism and massive appearance of Hanuman. Perhaps this sarcastic presentation in the mainstream cinema has some antecedents in the artistic tradition of the 19th century. Let us take, for example, the scroll paintings of the 19th century. The anecdote of Elokeshi and the Mahanta (head of a monastery) of Tarakeshwar depicted in the scroll paintings of Kalighat is illustrative in this context insofar as 'these paintings sarcastically portrayed the endeavours of western-educated women of the nineteenth century trying to establish their individuality, defying male hegemony of that time.' In other words, her image is constructed like that of a woman who sees her good through the good of her husband. So ironically it is pointed out that such gendered projec-

tions were not only seen in traditional texts but also amongst historians, but also filmmakers, artists they had attempted to show women as either domestic goddesses or attribute them with the feminine mystique. One of the reasons to represent the stereotypical image of women is because there has been a tendency to demarcate the history of the 'public' and the 'private' spheres. Such kind of division naturally blocks out women from any histories and deal with public spaces as women have been systematically kept out of political and prominent social religious, cultural ideological spaces. Kumkum Sangari has explained that it is this division of the public and private into discrete domains that lead to obfuscation as in practice public and private interpenetrate and are also produced together.



**Figure: 2, *Lanka Dahana* (1917): Film by Dada Saheb Phalke**

From the mid-1920s women in Indian cinema were presented as pure and ideal housewives, apart from the sacred character of women being depicted in the image of Puranic ideals. Thus, in '*Sati Charitra*' (1920), '*Paper Parinam*' (1924), '*Sati Lakshmi*' (1924), '*Dharma Patni*' (1926), '*Chashar Mehe*' (1931), '*Keranir Mash Kabar*' (1931), '*Maa*' (1933), '*An-*

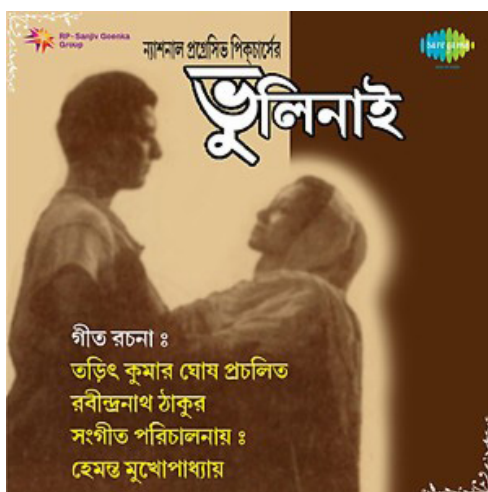
*napurnar Mandir*' (1935) and such other films, women found their fulfilment only as mothers and ideal housewives, as if they were bereft of individuality. Since she is a woman, she is weak and helpless and under the authority of the male and family. She is a devoted wife and a devoted soul to bringing up her children. Moreover, she is averse to protesting. This trend of stereotyped characterisation of women continued unabated in mainstream Indian cinema throughout the 1950s and '60s. The glorification of idealized homemakers or idealized mother in colonial Bengal was merely in the domain of ideology. Since has brought some possibility of women being in control is vitiated by patriarchal norms within which women produce children. Control over women's sexuality and appropriating her reproductive ability for perpetuating the cause of the patriarchal household was merged through the mechanism of rituals. Such an ideology based on a philosophy of deprivation for women in the world of practice. 'Transposing the material onto an inner/outer- *Ghar/Bahir*, home and world – the social place is divided, playing a significant role in the everyday practice of life. Gender differences fit into the division: men occupy the material world outside while women preserve at the home, its essence unaffected by the material world.'

In the mainstream Indian cinema, it has depicted that since a major aspect of the women's roles was considered in reproduction. Filmmakers had depicted that mothering is continued as the basic identity of women's lives as well as the organisation of the fami-

ly which is fundamental to the genesis of the ideology of women. Films like *'Ma'* (1951), *Dhool Ka Phool* (1959), *Aradhana* (1969), *'Deewar'* (1975) and others depicted that motherhood and mothering are usually perceived as naturally related. The idealisation of women's childbearing was not translated itself into rights and entitlements for a woman as the mother in Patriarchal society. The idealisation of motherhood in the Indian context is also apparent in the continued significance of Goddess worship. According to the mythology in India, mother goddess worship is not necessarily related to the concept of a biological mother. The centrality of motherhood is defining women's identities and their social roles. Yet undeniably, the valuation placed on a woman's capacity to bring forth life defines her position in society. The social formation of motherhood indicates that a woman who cannot bear children must be excluded from participating in certain family rituals and ceremonies. It could also threaten her social existence of her husband may feel justified in taking another wife.

In the colonial era with the emergence of Bourgeoisie nationalism, the directors caught hold the image of the mother to represent the nationalist aspirations. In the colonial period, the ideology of motherhood had an enormous importance in the cultural life of Bengal, as a phenomenon, which was undoubtedly unique. In the middle of 1940's directors like Debki Basu, Bimal Roy, Himanshu Rai, Kanji Bhai Rathore, visualized

to the women as the part of “*Desh*”. In the film ‘*Apna Gharh* (1942) directed by Devki Basu, there the women protagonist (grosser’s wife), represented as the image of ‘*Desha Matrika*’ who fought against British Raj for India’s emancipation. In the film she visualized as ‘*Dashabhuja* or *Durga*’ because she was a very careful wife- mother and as well as a great combatant. In films like ‘*UdayerPathe* (1944)’, ‘*Vandemataram* (1946)’, ‘*Dhartike Lal* (1946)’, ‘*Srinkhal* (1946)’, ‘*DesherDabi* (1948)’, women characters were visualized as the part of freedom movement of India. Hemen Gupta’s films *Bhulinai* (1948) and *42*’ (1950) both films could claim complete originality in their subject matter. One did not need to be told that the feelings of patriotism that runs through these films are the director’s own. Director Hemen Gupta portrayed a woman’s image as ‘*Deshamatrika*’ or ‘*Varatmata*’ for expressing his nationalist aspirations.



**Figure: 3, *Bhuli Nai* (1948): film, by Hemen Gupta: women’s image depicted as ‘*Deshamatrika*’ or ‘*Varatmata*’**

an Cinema because in those decades women considered as a valuable part of a cinematic context where they glorified as ‘*Deshamatrika*’ or the part of the nation. It is undeniable that filmmakers like Kanjibhai Rathore, V. Shantaram, Bimal Roy, Debaki Basu, Nitin Bose, Kawaja Abbas, they expressed their patriotic aspirations and nationalist emotions through the women characters, nevertheless, somehow those women protagonists were performed by the direction of male fantasies and patriarchal and values. It can be said that, in the context of Indian Nationalism, though ostensibly the debates touched upon every aspect of women’s being, so the hidden agenda was always that of control. Behind this urge for a control lay a fear of the powerful forces that lay buried within women as well nation-sexuality in one case and the demand for the social justice in the other- forces that could easily become overwhelming. Resolving the ‘women question’ in the sense meant that control of the nation (the body politic) was linked to the control of women (the female body). Further, the images of women as others could be drawn from the same reservoir of popular consequences as the image of ‘woman as the nation’. The West, in general, became the maker of essential ‘Indian-ness’ and not surprisingly converged centrally on the figure of the woman, focused on her devotion as a wife, her celibacy as a widow, and the rules for women’s rituals. The move from anti-imperialist rhetoric to nationalist self-definition is premised on the Indian woman (*Bharatiya Nari*), as a passive subject, centrally relegated

to the field of excess (nationalism), but excluded from the Arnoldian notion of culture which by implication belonged to men. It seems then as Chatterjee has shown (1989), that 'tradition' became the closed realm of the woman, even as the field of modernity opened up for men. Simultaneously every aspect of a woman's being, the hidden agenda was based upon the internationalization of this so-called ideal nationalism. Which put up for women simply reinforced the traditional notion that the fruition of women's lives lay in producing heroic sons. The nationalist ideology, therefore, was simply appropriated this orthodox bind on women's lives by glorifying it. This renewed ideological legitimacy made it even more difficult for women to exercise their choice or autonomy in the matter.

Scholar Jasodhara Bagchi pointed out that "distinct male anxiety in the glorification of motherhood- the need for authentication and the valour in the face of better organized cultural order of the rulers. The legitimacy that it accorded was not to the daughters but the sons of the mother. Socially and ideologically, the glorified Indian mother belongs to the world of myth. Where it touched reality, apart from the indirect sense of power, it may have given to a few exceptional Bengali women; the ideology of motherhood strengthened the social practice of hidden exploitation of women." With the emergence of Bengalis as the distinctive identity in the Gangetic delta, confirmation of the spirit of tender motherhood was found in the natural setting which Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay had described so movingly as

well (Sujalam Suphalam Shasyashyamalam). The natural bounty of soil encouraged the representation of Bengali woman as an affectionate mother, ever ready to respond to the demand of her children.

From the Vedic to the colonial period it had observed that 'motherhood' had seen as the ultimate identity of Hindu women. The concept of 'glorifying Hindu women' through her reproductive capacity was the excellent ploy to keep aside them from socio-economic privileges like education, and profession that was being wrested by men. Professor Bagchi has pointed out that the difference is that while in the social reform era addressed women and tried to bring the colonial state machinery to bear upon their lives, the nationalist era used motherhood as an only viable symbol of Bengali women-hood. Moreover, it was the symbol that helped to bridge the social-religious-and political domain of colonial society. Representation of motherhood through the nationalist approach was a multi-dimensional symbol and its authenticity arose out of its natural appropriateness to the social climate of Bengal. So in that context, we said that in 1940's Indian film directors those had portrayed the women as 'ideal mother' or '*Deshmatrika*' it had upheld the hierarchy of patriarchal control within the family. It made negative contributions to the lives of women. No wonder she was mythical as a symbol of order.

In the Post-Independence era, some historical moments indicated striking changes

in the lives of Indians. It was true that Indians vigorously waited for independence and they nurtured hopes, faiths optimism. Citizens of India thought that the new India Government would keep the old promises which brought out socio-economic-political immovability. In the mid of 1950's the Indian filmmakers, those who inspired by Indian nationalism in the pre-colonial era, they satisfied with the temporary eternalness and narrated the situation as '*Dukhbhare Din Bite rein Bhaia / Ab Sukh Ayo re*' or '*Oh, Subh... Kal Se Tyo Ayegi...*' Nevertheless, in the mid of 1950's the 'Shining India concept' had prostrated, because the independence was just the transformation of power. Though Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promised to execute the dreams of Indians, in the mid of 1950s, citizens of India's dreams were vivisected by refugee problems, inflation, unemployment, insufficiency of food grains etc.

In the middle of the 1950s, Partition of India, the Refugee problem, food movement, factory lockout, stifling of leftist politics, gave a big jolt to the creations of alternative filmmakers, which was stimulated by 'Avant-garde and Marxist praxis. In this context, Indian parallel film directors had chosen to women as subjects of their films, where women highlighted as flesh-blood women those who were an integral part of contemporary socio-economic and political unrest. 1957 was the significant era of Indian cinema because Meheboob's 'Mother India introduced a new depiction of the mother. In the film 'Mother India' there depicted a two-level portrayal of 'Mother', or

'Motherland' in wider connotation. On one level, it was the story of a woman's life, on the other, there was the timeless transcendental image of 'Mother'. In this film, the wife of a peasant family depicted as the symbol of India, who tried to keep alive the fundamental ethos of agriculture-dependent rural communities. In the final scene, we see old Radha initiated the modern method of watering in the land. It was through Radha's character that the mother and the land took on a symbolic connotation. It was an important time in India's economic history because the 'Green Revolution' had been just started. Consequently, the village and agriculture gained relevance. The able-bodied women were considered close to the earth, and the future of the land was delivered unto their hands. The heroine Radha is affectionate but her affection is not blind. She is a different new 'mother' though.



**Figure: 4, 'Mother India' (1957) there depicted two-level portrayal 'Mother', or 'Motherland' in wider connotation**

The parallel filmmakers considered motherhood as one of the bases of women's oppression because it creates and reproduces male dominancy. Filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli has explained in the personal interaction

that “...the theories of subjugation, oppression are grappled with the fact of the material bodies of women. The human body has been perceived differently while by Marx as the economic body and by Freud as the sexual body, rather than the body as a whole, constituting as an individual. Feminists like Beauvoir, Wollstonecraft, explained that the female body is more than a biological entity rather than a politically inscribed entity. If we recall de Beauvoir’s observation there find patriarchal culture constructs both women and nature as ‘other’, both are to be crushed and exploited. Within the patriarchal social structure, pregnancy has alienated women from herself, from culture, making it difficult for her to be the agent of her destiny and engage in her transcendence (Kasaravalli: 2018) Ritwik Ghatak first explored the truth in his film ‘Nagarik’ (1953), that women’s economic subordination is reinforced by patriarchal, cultural and religious attitudes. He explained that the basic tendency of fundamentalism is placing the ideal woman on a pedestal as an iconic mother while knocking the real flesh blooded woman down. He depicted through the character of ‘Ramu’s mother that, a woman whose life was by the subsistence households, their socio-economic dependency, did not undermine her ability as decision-makers but also her health and others basic needs were neglected. She was treated as a caretaker of household and childbearing instrument.

In ‘Nagarik’, (1952) Ritwik depicted those feelings of anxiety and peril through the character of Ramu’s mother who committed

to the maintenance of the family. The character of Ramu’s mother in ‘Nagarik’ (1952) was an example of many other helpless housewives, those who fought a daily battle against poverty as the anchor of the family. Feelings of peril and anxiety devastate her when she is anguished at her inability to provide two square meals to every member of her family, or her sufferings when she fails to marry off her daughter, Sita because of financially straitened circumstances. The milk of her affection dried up as she failed to cope with extreme penury. She clung to Sagar, their paying guest, as the support system. Ramu’s existence became insignificant to her for his inability to earn money. He even forfeited the right to his mother’s affection. Ritwik portrayed the character of Ramu’s mother in the context of contemporary socio-economic reality. In contemporary mainstream cinema, the character of the mother was patently stereotyped: that she is tolerant and blind with affection. Ritwik’s portrayal was completely different; he realized it was unjustified to evaluate a woman of flesh and blood as a so-called ‘ideal mother’ in extreme poverty. Beleaguered by poverty and the burden of maintaining the family, she was anxious-ridden and imperilled. And she became increasingly irritable. Unwilling to understand Ramu’s mental crisis, she expressed her resentment against Ramu in these words:

*‘I cooked whatever rice from Jadavpur had been left. The cards will be of no use this week unless we draw the ration this morning. It is early morning he has gone out in*

*the name of earning. Neither does he have concern for the family nor does he think about getting a job. And it is me alone who is sending outcries for help amidst this ugly poverty.'*

----- (Nagarik: 1952)



**Figure: 5, Nagarik (1952): A film by Ritwik Ghatak**

Through the character of Ramu's mother, Ghatak tried to explain in his film '*Nagarik*' (1952) that in the context of post-partition India the evolution of the political understanding of the process of development, had strengthened to a patriarchal structure. He indicated state as an inconsistent actor because on many occasion state and traditional patriarchy are in binary opposition, while in other circumstances the state is the patriarchy which oppresses women. Indian state reflects tendencies of a post-structuralist state which relates to women in unpredictable and uncertain ways. The factors that decide whether the state will act in pro or anti-gender ways in determined by the constructions of a mother, and the meaning of these constructions. Ghatak depicted while the Indian state in simultane-

ously fractured, oppressive, threatening [and] also providing spaces for struggle and negotiation make the need for a mother to influence discourse and meanings all the more critical.

In his epic creation, '*Pather Panchali*' (1955), Satyajit Ray explained through the character of Sarvajaya that in the context of Indian Patriarchal society women idealized as self-sacrificing wife and mother assuming her natural place in the home for the upbringing of India's greatest assets- her children, especially sons. In the film '*Aparajito*' (1956) Ray criticized the Gandhi's conception of women's roles in post-independent India, while Gandhi's view was the self-realization for men and women had to be conducted in the separate sphere for women it was in the private sphere involving the upbringing and education of children. Exploring the character of Sarvajaya Ray indicated an onslaught on even existing rights of women through a harking back to tradition and culture and positing of images which emphasis women's reproductive roles as only natural, historical one. The blind affection of Sarvajaya towards Apu depicted that the question of son preference alongside gender asymmetries, which related to the different types of inquiry- contradiction, challenge, and change. In '*Pather Panchali*' (1955) motherhood was closely tangled with socio-material-cultural and political norms, while poverty and inequality were unrestrained to indulgence on the part of the poor and leading to impending doom.



**Figure: 6, *Pather Panchali*' (1955): Film by Satyajit Ray: While motherhood was closely tangled with socio-material-cultural and political norms**

In Ritwik Ghatak's '*Meghe Dhaka Tara*' (1960), Nita's mother is a typical refugee housewife who, torn apart by a day-to-day bitter struggle for mere survival. She led to measure all relationships in terms of earning money. Thus, she reproaches her eldest son and provokes him into leaving home. She is alarmed by Nita's relationship with Sanat. She is afraid that if Nita marries Sanat, the family will lose their only source of income. So she does not hesitate to indulge Gita's game of seduction in the obscure room in the colony or beside the dark pond. Sankar, her eldest son, has left home to become an artist and Gita for a prosperous conjugal life; Mantu is after attaining a better status in life. All this is of little concern to Nita's mother. It is Nita she clings to like a spider, for her Nita is the only support, the only means of survival of the impoverished family. Unwittingly, she lets Nita become a machine for earning money. When

Nita's father raises the issue of her marriage, she is alarmed, for that would spell doom for the family. She reprimands her ailing husband in these words:

*'You're too naïve. If she gets married, what will we be left with? Sucking our thumbs?'*

----- (Meghe Dhaka Tara:1960)



**Figure: 7, '*Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960): Film by Ritwik Ghatak: while in mothering image the question of purity and moral values is inconsequential**

In the film, Ghatak indicated that motherhood constitutes a political issue when it is bound up with the idea of the family and more specifically when it is related to the concept of maintenance and survival. Ghatak depicted although Nita's mother projected as selfish cruel women, nonetheless, she always put her interests and demands of the family above her. The character of Nita's mother is very much grounded in reality, as deftly analyzed by a refugee intellectual. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that though Ritwik invested some of his female characters with symbolism to excess, some are very much of this

world, full of flesh and blood. Nita's mother in *'Meghe Dhaka Tara'* is such a character, who wants her family, along with sons and daughters, to survive from her sense of duty as a housewife. In this imperative of survival, the question of purity and moral values is inconsequential. Thus, she wants her earning daughter Nita to remain a maiden for life. She is unable to repose trust in Nita's sacrifice. She is haunted by the fear of her family's ruin because of want of money, which drives her to selfishness and mistrust of her daughter Nita. It is from a sense of insecurity that she wants to be assured, time and again, about Nita's commitment to the family:

*'Mother: I often get to think you've also desires and dreams of your own, or something else.'*

*Nita: Forget it, I've no one else but you.*

*Mother: Maybe, but I feel a little consolation. Maybe you're born of my womb, yet you seem to be not of my own. I'm scared to even of you.'*

----- (Meghe Dhaka Tara: 1960)

Film critics analyse the character of Nita's mother in these terms: 'In Ritwik's *'Meghe Dhaka Tara'* (1960) the character of Nita's mother represents a cruel, selfish and crooked woman.' Kumar Shahni blames on Nita's mother for Nita's reverses of fortune and her death.' But Ritwik viewed it from a different angle. Though Nita's mother is by no means selfish, her apparent selfishness is born of

deep concern for the preservation of her family. Her dream of a two-storied house is for the betterment of her family. But, at the same time, one discerns a streak of heartlessness among the guardians in pursuit of comfort and happiness, which is underscored in this film. In his article entitled *'Aloukik Pratispardha'*, Abhijit Sen reminisces, 'After Partition, we were as helpless and terrified birds in a cage. Our guardians were baffled by Partition and they felt insecure. They struggled extremely hard to ensure the existence of their families. Yet, at the same time, this struggle often bred baseness and cruelty on their part which was a sordid tale, a dark chapter, by all accounts.'

In the 1980s, in the context of Indian cinema, the representation of mothers perpetuates patriarchal norms by separating female sexuality, work, and motherhood into distinct spheres. Identity assertion- sexual desire and women's participation in the public domain were threatened to the image of the ideal mother or Patibrata Stree. In *'Parama'* (1984) director Aparna Sen has depicted the historical truth, that when the concept of private property emerged then women's participation confined in between four walls of the home, where women are degraded, enthralled and treated as a slave of man's desire and they are used as childbearing and child producing machine. Patriarchy has controlled women's sexual and reproductive capacities which are glorified motherhood as self scarifies- a devoted-humble mother whose existence is only confined with to reproduce heroic sons. Patriarchy has

created a sharp division between private and public, which restricts women's mobility and growth and reproduces male domination. In the film Sen has explained that how the questions of female labor within the household have ignored, in the arena of family, myths of motherhood always devaluates women's position as a homemaker. Aparna Sen depicted that it is almost old Indian tradition whereas venerating mother as a goddess and the goddess revering as a mother. When Parama's identity confines in between four walls of a home and submissively she did her roles as wife-mother and homemaker, then Parama compared with the image of 'Durga'. Director Aparna Sen depicted that it is obvious that mothering relationships are much like other social relationships and, like them, are bound to take shape from the broader political and economic order within which they are forged. The '*Parama*' (1984) director explained that there is always a connection between the conception of motherhood and sexuality because there is a general paradigm of cross-cultural persistence of male domination, which is based on two cross-cultural constants common to most women. At the end of the movie director, Aparna Sen raised the question that when Parama as mother, inclines towards a total indulgence of her offspring's wants and demands (whether these are related to feeding, cleaning, sleeping or being kept company) then she depicted as good Indian mother, but in the meanwhile, while she started to rediscover her self-identity and has given the shape of her sexual desire, the patriarchy stig-

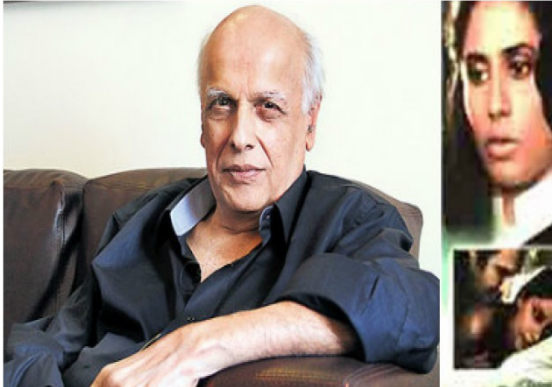
matized her as 'immoral whore'. Sen explored the truth that there is a very thin line between good-bad, moral-immoral, those are socially constructed by patriarchy.



**Figure:8, *Parama* (1984): Film by Aparna Sen**

In the early phase of the 1980s, a trend was received by a group of directors, those who were strict with the concept that motherhood is not only related with the biological reproduction but also child-rearing and caring considered as gender-neutral performance and practice. In the film *Aarth* (1982) Mahesh Bhatt also tried to explore that the outliers' narratives complicate our understanding of women's "choice" vis-à-vis motherhood - their disillusionment with glorified femininity and caregiving, the ubiquity of salient cultural ideologies, as well as human yearning for approval, and women's (Foucauldian) "self-surveillance" all confront each other in this life-altering decision. It seems as if the terrain of motherhood presents women with more difficult partial and less real choice. The narratives chronicle the contingencies and positionalities of these sometimes de-gendered identities. In the film director raised the question that the enactment and meaning of choice are heterogeneous. A 'yes' to motherhood

may not be an affirmation to its ideologies and a 'no' may not even be directed at the desirability of motherhood per se but the ethics of making more humans or conflicts between paid work and caregiving.



**Figure: 9, *Aarth* : (1982) film by Mahesh Bhatt: the terrain of motherhood presents women with more difficult partial and less real choice**

Theoretical implications about the mother and motherhood in the film have prolonged across the world. The sudden emergence of the idea to raise a debate about the representation of motherhood in Indian culture was influenced by the feminist film theories in the 1970s onwards. Several scholarships revealed that to understand not only how the mother or maternal is represented in films but also most significantly what the function of representation is. In the early era to the present context, it is the main trend of mainstream cinema to make a sharp deviation between good mother and bad mother which were historically associated with the mother goddesses cult (Good Goddesses and Bad Goddesses). The mainstream cinema located that womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood within the duties of domestic labour, while goddess rit-

ual creates submissive sacrifice qualities, and concentrate on producing a subjectivity of not owing valour among women concerning husbands and sons. In the mainstream cinema, the concept of "good" mother is always depicted as one who feeds the child on-demand with a wholesome homemade complex. Renowned Indian psychologist Sudhir Kakar states: The Indian mother is intensely attached to the child ... From the moment of birth, the Indian infant is greeted and surrounded by ... relentless physical ministrations the emotional sensuality of nurturing in traditional Indian families serves to amplify the effects of physical gratification. An Indian mother is inclined towards a total indulgence of her infant's wants and demands whether these be related to feeding, cleaning, sleeping or being kept company. Moreover, she tends to extend this sort of mothering to well beyond the time when the 'infant' is ready for independent functioning in many areas. Thus, feeding at all times of night and day and 'on-demand'. (Kakar: 1996)

Meanwhile, I would like to raise the argument, that while the parallel filmmakers committed to portraying 'Mother' character as real flesh-blooded rather than a symbolic ideal prototype, so why few of them did implement the Jungian 'archetype'? In the film, '*Devi*' (1960) Ray condemned to the patriarchal ideas of imposing the image of a mother goddess on women and depicted the truth that the status of the Devi or goddess which is a veiled form of exercising male authority but it fails to recognize women's rights when it is about

to be achieved. Ray depicted behind the glorification of women, paraded with pomp and splendor by male authority, how women lose their individuality. Vice versa director Ritwik introduced the archetypes, as useful methods of retrieving women's identity, rights, and dignity in the patriarchal social order. In this regard Ghatak argued that motherhood is one of the values protected by people, who have, through thousands of years, privileged the position of women by bestowing on the Mother supernatural powers as a bulwark against disasters. Ritwik held the view that 'mother complex is a basic primordial force', which he used as a tool against exploitation, in which the archetype manifests itself sometimes in a 'benevolent' form and sometimes in its 'terrible image'. In this regard, Ritwik was deeply influenced by Jung's 'Stream of Collective Unconscious'.

According to Jung, there resides in every male's subconscious the image of an ideal woman. This abstract image of a woman has formed over thousands of years of men's experiences about women. Jung identified this image of women is constructed by male imagination as 'anima'. According to Jung, this anima is the 'Great Mother', who has two aspects: the benevolent and the terrible. Ritwik was so much influenced by this theory that, in his films, he brought to the fore the image of the 'Great Mother', as a rejuvenating force as a way out of women's repression and erosion of human values.



**Figure:10, Great Mother Archetype: Jagaddhatri Image: Titash Ekti Nadir Naam**

Though a Marxist, Ritwik was evidently influenced by Jung's theory of 'Collective Unconscious' or the theory of the 'Great Mother'. He explained his position thus: 'There's no contradiction between Marx and Jung in so far as the collective unconscious determines men's unconscious behaviour, whereas the entire class structure determines their conscious behaviour. These two are complementary because Marxism is valid when men become socially as well as politically conscious as a class when they are engaged in real activities. But Marxism has no explanation when it comes to the question of dreams as the manifestation of the subconscious mind, where Jung is the last work.'

Ritwik believed that the concept of the 'Great Mother' was born of fear and wonder of people in primitive societies. He was also aware of the fact that this turned in the hands of the clerics into a tool of exploitation in the garb of religion to perpetuate male hegemony in society and benefit the ruling class. This notwithstanding, he modelled his central female characters on the image of the 'Great

Mother', the image incarnate of self-sacrifice, tolerance and preservation. This emotional engagement with the image of the 'Mother' transforms the women characters into symbols. It is worth mentioning at this point that before Ritwik the image of Bengali mothers as tolerant, self-sacrificing and affectionate had been glorified from the nationalist viewpoint, which defined motherhood in these words: 'The human ideal was one of all-suffering mother: the marvellous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother.' Ritwik used the 'Mother' image in order to glorify sacrifice and tolerance of Bengali middle-class women in post-Independence Bengal. Like Elliot, Brecht and Godard, Ritwik too wanted to build a tunnel back to mythical times so that the apparent reality merges into the real to infuse life into the sculpture of contemporary reality. In this respect, '*Meghe Dhaka Tara*' and '*Subarnarekha*' are two films worth mentioning.

It assumes that the realist filmmakers did not portray the mother character either as a symbol of selflessness nor as bad stereotype women. For them, mother characters were depicted as well aware of the predicament, what a housewife had faced during sustaining of family within economic hardships. There is her sense of peril, face to face with extreme poverty; on the other, her urge to protect it, preserve it, hardships notwithstanding. Parallel filmmakers depicted the mothers as first and foremost a housewife whose commitment

is to the family as a whole. It is from this commitment that they exploited their breadwinner children and treated them like a machine for earning money. But, somewhere, one discerns their latent feelings of affection for their children, though these are not articulated in tangible terms in the perspective of poverty and social insecurity. In the film '*Meghe Dhaka Tara*' (1960) Nita's mother's latent motherhood pricked her conscience for she has smothered her daughter's dreams for the sake of her family. Thus, she repeatedly says, 'It's not what I wanted'. Driven by feelings of motherhood, she bares her soul, tormented by remorse, before Nita and wants to be with her helpless dying daughter in a friendless world. She wants to understand and share her sorrows and sufferings the other members of the family did not:

*'Mother: What's the matter with you? You come at night and lay your bed in the outer house.'*

*Nita: Does it matter? It's all the same. It's a friendless world, anyway.'*

*Mother: Will you hide it even from me? Won't you tell me anything?'*

----- (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*: 1960)

In mainstream cinema, the character of the mother was constructed in the image of a biological mother who has some pre-determined role to play. In other words, a mother means a selfless figure whose affection is bountiful. But the parallel filmmakers departed from this construct of motherhood by patriarchal values as they analysed in depth the character of mothers in the context of an uncertain world where bare survival was at stake. The mothers emerged as a flesh and blood mother with all her failings and redeeming features too.

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***Dr. Debjani Halder is the Film Research Officer of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune.***