



A Journey towards Rediscovery of the Self of a Woman: A Study on the Film Parama

Dr. Arunima Goswami

Assistant Professor
Department of Cultural Studies
Assam Women's University
Rowriah, Jorhat

Abstract:

Film being a form of art of moving images and a complex artistic expression is not entirely a source of entertainment. A film can be considered as a potent influencer and multilayered expression with the ability to address the audience, to enunciate, up heave and to construct a perceptivity or ideology of a group of people. Women's film does not significantly have its own lineage and known territory. It was the ideology of feminist movement during 1960's, which waggled the world putting an impact on film makers to desire for portraying women's issues in cinema. However the reel life of woman is just the extension of the roles and functions prescribed by the society and performed by a woman in her real life. Aparna Sen as a director has achieved a rare level of perfection in selecting the themes and directing her movies, that sets her apart. The theme experimented in the movie Parama directed by Aparna Sen could be found rarely in the movies during 80's and 90's. The film delineates a married woman's unconventional attempt to overcome the patriarchal impulses of society in India. This present article makes an attempt to understand how the domain of patriarchy compels to lose the identity of a woman after her marriage. Further the article not only puts an attempt to analyze the psychic conflict encountered by the protagonist Parama due to the subordination created by her family, it also examines the rediscovery of the old self of Parama to create an identity of her choice after she confronted with a situation that caused her to attempt suicide.

Keyword: Film, Women in Indian film, concept of self, male gaze, Sigmund Freud's interpretation of dreams

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I. Introduction

Film being a form of art of moving images and a complex artistic expression is not entirely a source of entertainment. A film can be considered as a potent influencer and multilayered expression with the ability to address the audience, to enunciate, up heave and to construct a perceptivity or ideology of a group of people. Women's film does not significantly have its own lineage and known territory. It was the ideology of feminist movement during 1960's, which waggled the world putting an impact on film makers to desire for portraying women's issues in cinema. Different film festivals as well as journals started recuperating women's roles and representations in films and in film making.

Indian film is embedded or ingrained in the representation of history, culture and tradition from its very inception. Initially it developed with the stimulation by the colonial encounter and with the development of new media during 19th century. The film Raja Harichandra based on Hindu mythology directed by Dada Saheb Phalke in the year 1913 formed the very genesis of Indian cinema. However the film did not involve any female actor to play women's role. Later Phalke selected his daughter to play a role in his film Bhamasur Mohini and it certainly created a history and opened up the door to make an access for female actors to enter into Indian cinema. But it could not mark any difference between the reel roles and real life roles of women. The dominating roles of women in Indian cinema revolve around the principles found in Manusmriti that is an ideal woman belongs to her father during her childhood, to her husband in youth and later to her son. Therefore the reel life of woman is just the extension of the roles and functions prescribed by the society and performed by a woman in her real life. She is expected either to be a chaste woman as like Sita, or a virtuous wife of Raam, or an epitome of morality, loyalty, virtuous of honour and strength as like Savitri, who can bring back the life of

her husband from Yama, the God of death. Women conforming to these roles are portrayed as happy or content or satisfied, and if not then they are clustered as unfitting, unconscionable or non-conformist.

Aparna Sen as a director has achieved a rare level of perfection in selecting the themes and directing the movies, that sets her apart. She was primarily attracted towards the ideology of feminism while choosing concepts for her films, however she dealt with other issues and subjects as well. The theme experimented in the movie Parama directed by Aparna Sen could be found rarely in the movies during 80's and 90's. The film delineates a married woman's unconventional attempt to overcome the patriarchal impulses of society in India. Aparna Sen wrote the script of the movie Parama by herself from the experiences she encountered in her life.

This present article makes an attempt to understand how the domain of patriarchy compels to lose the identity of a woman after her marriage. Further the article not only puts an attempt to analyze the psychic conflict encountered by the protagonist Parama due to the subordination created by her family, it also examines the rediscovery of the old self of Parama to create an identity of her choice after she confronted with a situation that caused her to attempt suicide.

Methodology and Data Collection

The present research is based on a systematic analysis of the movie Parama to justify the objectives as intended. A qualitative analysis has been undertaken by the researcher to have a clear understanding of the resources collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. Different theoretical approaches have been interpreted in this work to have a considerate analysis on the conflicts experienced by the character Parama in the movie. Primary resource of this work is the movie Parama, whereas secondary resources have been collected from various books, articles, journals, online sources etc.

Concept of Self

The concept of self has been conceptualized differently by different thinkers and the definitions are addressed from many angles. It generally refers to how someone anticipates, appraises or perceives about them. As Baumeister (1999) manifested the definition of self-concept as "The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is." The concept of self has a significant influence in structuring everyday life as it has the ascendancy to regulate the way we think, act, and feel. Carl Rogers has discussed three constituent parts of self. They are-self image, that is the way a person sees themselves; self esteem, that is how the person senses about themselves; and ideal-self, that is the way others view the person (Shahmoradian). The contents and the functions of the concept of self are nurtured by- culture, education, gender, age, and relation they share with others etc. Self image does not necessarily concur with reality. A person may find himself/herself with a distended self, which may compel him/her to live with the believe that he/she can perform better than the performance he/she gives in reality. Contrarily people are also inclined towards having negative self-image. Thus the concept of self is a blend of many aspects including physical characteristics. Most of the time how we perceive ourselves does not match with the way others see us.

About the movie Parama

The notion of post colonialism has put a far reaching impact on Indian culture starting from its dress pattern, food habit to life style and housing style etc. However the position of women, their financial dependency, familial roles such as a mother, wife, daughter etc did not make out much positive change. Therefore the pace and multiplicity in the choice of themes as well as characters differed from others in the works of Aparna Sen. Aparna Sen, a notable film director was also known as an eminent actor in the Bengali film industry. Starting her career as an actor Sen shifted her interest towards the work of film making. Aparna Sen's films were normally realistic portraying social and family issues specifically concentrating on feminist ideology. The film Parama directed by Aparna Sen was released in 1985. In this movie the director concentrated on portraying a married woman's uncustomary attempt to overcome the patriarchal notions set by the Indian society to choose a life of her own by internalizing the worth of the self identity of a woman. The film Parama received 33rd National Film Awards in the year 1986 and won the National Award for the Best Bengali Feature Film. Dipankar Dey, who played the role of Parama's husband, won Silver Lotus Award in the category of Best Supporting Actor.

The characters as well as the casts of the movie are as follows-

Character 1	The chief role of the movie that is Parama was played by Rakhee Guljar. Parama lost her self-identity post marriage and later she rediscovered the same breaking the barrier of conventional norms of patriarchal society.
Character 2	The role of Parama's husband Bhaskar Choudhury was played by Dipankar Dey. Western thoughts and traditions influenced the lifestyle of Dipankar dey, however he was not free from patriarchal norms. He expected his wife to be readily available to fulfil all his desires, but he was inconsiderate towards her needs and desires.
Character 3	Aparna Sen's second husband Mukul Sharma played the role of a photographer named Rahul, who came from abroad for a photo-shoot. Parama got involved in an extra-marital affair with Rahul to satisfy her inner desires,

	which she lost post her marriage.
Character 4	Aparna Sen herself acted the character Sheela to play the role of an independent woman and a friend of Parama in this movie. Aparna Sen as a participant observer in the movie put subtle force on Parama to be able to think of a life for herself.
Character 5	Anil Chatterjee played the role Dr. Dasgupta.
Character 7:	Shandhya Rani played the role of Parama's mother-in-law.
Character 8:	Chaiti Ghosal played the role of Parama's daughter.

The narrative of the movie conveys a convoluted tale of an interdict affair. It provides a subjective vision of the world through a different perception of reality. Parama the protagonist of the film approaching her middle-age was married to a middle class wealthy family. The film began with an entangled sequence of Durga Puja, the morning rituals at the breakfast table of Parama's family, the everyday household chores, and set up of an affluent home. Parama being a quintessential Indian housewife was very dutiful towards her family and looked after everyone in the family. She took permission from her mother-in-law before carrying out any household chore. She was caught in household activities throughout the day to fulfil everyone's desire. Because of that she could not make time and acquiescence to nourish her own identity. It certainly impelled her to lose her self-identity. Meanwhile a photo journalist called Rahul, who came from abroad was introduced to Parama's family by a family member. He was on a project to capture images of a traditional Bengali house wife. He chose Parama to be the perfect one for his project and received permission from the family to shoot Parama's pictures. Initially Parama was unwilling to give her consent for the same, but later as asked by her husband and the mother-in-law she agreed to do that. After spending time during the photo-shoot both Parama and Rahul developed a different kind of affinity with each other, and with time it transformed into love. This camaraderie ameliorated Parama's psychological condition to reach into a different satisfaction beyond her usual familial roles as a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. Rahul equally extended his support to meet her inner desires. This is how Parama engaged in an extramarital affair with Rahul. After completing his photo-shoot Rahul went back to Paris to resume his work. Parama again returned back to her usual role and indulged in pampering her family once again. The affair between Rahul and Parama, rather the rediscovery of Parama's life turned into a perplexing situation and created problem when Rahul entrapped her by publishing some semi nude photographs in a magazine, which were not shown to the family earlier. Parama's husband found an envelope of photographs with a message conveying love to Parama by Rahul. Parama's resentment being rejected by her husband as well as her family due to this incident made her to go through a mental breakdown. The ideal image of Parama was rubbed out in front of her family. The psychic conflict encountered by Parama compelled her to attempt suicide by cutting her nerves and she fell down by her head. The family admitted her in a hospital. Doctors advised to perform a brain operation as she had severe head injury. After the operation she regained her consciousness and observed that her entire family was sitting around her. Everyone tried to talk to her, however Parama did not answer anything to anyone. Everyone opined that due to her head injury she was not in a state to start a conversation. Actually she did not consider herself as guilty in front of the family, though her family considered so and Parama was reluctant not to talk with anyone. As per doctor's advice the family agreed to do a psychiatric treatment of Parama and they were ready to accept her back. Parama could not allow herself to live a life with the family where she could not find a space and the liberty to nourish her identity. She approached her friend Sheela to help her to find a job and to become financially independent. In the end Parama recalled the name of a plant bearing a metaphorical significance, which Parama nourished in the entire movie but could not recall the same before the incident happened to her.

II. Conclusion

The movie is composed of a precise and deliberate way of formulating a discourse to criticise the notion that is engaged in dominating and overshadowing recognition of the self-identity of women. The articulation of the character Parama illustrated the very fact that the projection of woman as "other" and man as "self" is not inherited naturally, rather it is constructed through a course of representation. Representation of the character Parama can be explored through various other approaches as well. Feminist scholars' use of semiotic and psychoanalytic theories to reveal the way of representation of women in cinema is significant to mention here. The article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" by Laura Mulvey leads a significant way in this regard. The concept of 'male gaze' is delineated in a comprehensive way to deconstruct the subjectivity of women on the screen. Gaze is considered as a manifestation of power connected with eyes and the sense of sight (Cavallaro 131). In the course of gazing male controls the power against woman, who is looked at. In the cinema, Parama was being secretly or sometime openly gazed by Rahul to fulfil his desire. Sigmund Freud's interpretation of dreams can be observed in the movie as well. He explained, "The dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish" (Wollheim 61). One night Parama saw a dream of her aunt saying her to remove the chain in order to liberate herself. Perhaps Parama considered herself in the position of her aunt

who lived a dissembled life. After recovering herself from her attempt to do suicide Parama desperately desired to extricate her from all the duties she performed for everyone in the family without receiving any appreciation. It was again observed that the potted plant nurtured by Parama bears a very significant symbolic representation in the movie. She could recall the name of the plant after the traumatic incident that she went through. Though she nurtured it for a long time but she was unable to recall the name before the incident took place. The entire life of Parama in the movie until she discovers an identity of herself with the help of her friend Sheela to become financially independent before receiving emotional independence is connected with the portrayal of the plant. Parama's daughter accompanied her mother to cherish the liberation and to be with her around to care for the tenacity that her mother has embraced.

Therefore it can be observed that Parama was found with an interdependent self as her approach towards life was guided by the expectations and obligations provided by her family. Her self-construal experienced socially engaged emotions. In spite of having an identity of her own Parama had to break physical as well as mental disgrace due to her little aberration from the conventional roles and subordination entrenched by the society through men. Later introspections of inner feelings and thoughts helped Parama to internalize her own self, which happened to be powerful source to influence her behaviour. Thus Aparna Sen put an attempt to present women community in a new pedestal through this movie.

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