

## The Angry woman of Indian Cinema - A Saga of the Marginal

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### Abstract

In Indian cinema, the concept of anger was associated with men, popularizing the idea of 'Angry young man' not 'Angry young woman,' which in fact catapulted many male actors career to undisputed stardom. Women remained marginalized even in this sector. As per the gender stereotype of emotion, anger is associated with men. However, there are some women characters in Indian cinema whose bold portrayal of the emotion of anger has rightfully caught the eyes of the critics. This paper is an attempt to portray the anger of women in different roles- mother, wife, sister, friend, and prostitute, to name a few. This study is based on some selected 'angry' female characters of Indian cinema who were more often than not overshadowed by the 'angry' male characters. The study is qualitative in nature which follows the form of narration for analyzing the emotion of anger in women of Indian cinema.

**Key Words:-** Emotion, Anger, Women, Marginal, Indian Cinema.

## I. Introduction

Emotion is a conscious mental reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed towards a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioural changes in the body. Happiness, love, fear, anger, hatred, trust, joy, grief, hurt, shame, loneliness, etc. are some terms to express Emotion. Among the above, anger is a natural emotion experienced by everyone and impossible to avoid. More often it is termed as unwanted or unreasonable rather a negative emotion. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, Anger is “a feeling of extreme displeasure, hostility, indignation, on someone or something; rage, wrath; ire.” (1981, p.50). Whereas, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines anger as “a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism.” (Anger. n.d). Besides, Park and Kim define anger as a “powerful emotion that has been associated with a host of negative psychological outcomes, including externalizing problems such as aggression and delinquency” (2012, p. 1339). It can be expressed through body language, facial expression, and verbal and physical aggression. “Anger is a residue of our biological past, which under more civilized circumstances, we can control only imperfectly” (Averill, 1983). Moreover, the feeling of anger has been documented since biblical times when the supreme power God became angry and punished the people. Hence, anger is a natural reaction towards frustration, threat, or criticism.

Emotions are associated with gender. For example, stereotypically, happiness, and sadness are associated with women, whereas; anger and pride are associated with men. If anger is

displayed in women, it would be labelled as worse, bitchy, unladylike, bossy, or hostile, and if it displays in man, it would be considered power or dominance. The psychologist Ursula Hess says that “The present research shows that the association between anger and men and happiness and women is so strong that it can influence the decisions about the gender of another person when that person is viewed briefly.” The belief that women are more emotional than men is one of the strongest gender stereotypes held in Western cultures (Grills, 2004).

Indian cinema has become a significant source of entertainment and strongly influenced everyone's thinking. Indian cinema presents Indian society in such a way that it touches every common man's life. It has always been admired for its melodrama, sentimental, and emotional features that deal with Indian social, political corruption, true events, caste discrimination, violence against women, and many more controversial and burning issues. People discuss and read issues like gender inequality every day, but they do not pay much attention to it or cannot relate it to their lives directly. However, Indian cinema has the power to make an individual think about such issues and analyse it at personal level.

Indeed, the 1970s witnessed an emergence of action-oriented cinema with a typical ‘angry young man’ as the protagonist. The reason behind this portrayal might be 60s war, volatile political situation, a decade of disillusionment, Indira factor, or emergency. The gradual disappearance of the feudal family leads to the emergence of a mine worker, gang-leader, dock worker, porter, and a police officer as the new hero. The portrayal of an angry young man surreptitiously entered into the house of a common Indian man through these characters. Barring few lead actresses, in most Indian cinemas the characters of lady protagonists hovered around the idea of purity and chastity (60s & 70s). The actresses were portrayed as God-fearing religious individuals. Actresses (protagonists) do not smoke or drink, they are non-flirtatious, do not make sexual advances, and do not appear in item dance numbers. However mere objectification of actresses in the form of rain dance (to the tunes of lewd lyrics), frames in various sensuous modes, the famous behind the bushes scenes are prevalent all through the ages. Although many women-centric cinemas have been prepared over the years, these cinemas have not been able to break the age-old patriarchal stereotypes. Still there are some women characters which fighting the limitations of traditional roles, came out successful in their portrayals of ‘angry woman.’ In fact, over the past two decades, Indian cinema has been representing revolutionary characters who more than self pitying themselves are breaking the typical gender stereotype with the element of wrath. This paper attempts a study on female characters in different roles from Indian cinema and their tryst with anger.

## II. Depiction of Anger in Mother

Motherhood is bliss, the perfect choice, the real incarnation of happiness. In Indian Cinema a mother has been portrayed as an epitome of love and kindness, but there are a very few characters where a mother has broken this stereotype and has emerged as a strong lady first and a mother next such as *Mother India* (1957), *Devdas* (2002), *Shakti: The Power* (2002), *Luck by chance* (2009), *Goliyon ki Raasleela Ram Leela* (2013).

Mehboob Khan’s 1957 cinema ‘*Mother India*’ is a defining epic drama cinema in Bollywood, which won countless accolades and ran for more than three decades. It is a story of an ordinary and deprived village woman named Radha (Nargis), who faces many hardships in

the absence of her husband Shamu (Raj Kumar). She struggles to raise her sons and survives against the cunning and greedy money-lender Sukhilala (Kanhaiyalal). Despite all struggles and hardships, she never compromises with her honour and sets an extraordinary example of courage.

Initially, Radha has been portrayed as a normal ideal wife, responsible daughter-in-law, and a loving and caring mother. The famous song “Duniya mein aaye hain to jeena hi padega, jivan hai agar zeher to peena hi padega” (If we have come to this world then we have to live. If life is poison then we have to drink this poison) hints the dichotomy between Radha as a traditional Indian woman and socialist strong working woman.

Radha expressed her anger when her son Birjoo (Raj Kumar) abducted Sukhilala’s daughter. At that time, she promised Sukhilala that she would protect his daughter’s honour. She warned Birjoo to leave Sukhilala’s daughter, otherwise she will shoot him. On that Birjoo laughed and said “Tu mujhe nahi mar sakti tu meri Maa hai” (You can’t kill me, you are my mother), but Radha replied “Main pehle ek aurat hoon” (I am a women first) “Main beta de sakti hu Laz Nai” (I can give my son away but not my honour) and she shot him dead. The Character of Radha even today stands as a model of female solidarity.

Another selected cinema that portrays the mother's anger is Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s 2013 cinema Ramleela. Dhankor Baa (Supriya Pathak) has been portrayed as one of the boldest mother on screen. She was a strong matriarch whom everyone was afraid of, including her children. Her character represented a quintessential matriarch of higher ranking and respected leader that led the family clan business and survived well in the male-dominated society. She was not a typical mother who forgives one’s children. She punished Leela (Deepika Padukone) for her sin and even cut her finger off when Leela defied her. She believed that “Goli or Gussa Sahi wakt par kharch karna chaiye” (We need to spend bullet and anger at the right time).

### III. Depiction of anger in Wife

In 60s and 70s, the wife was often stereotyped as a woman who would wake up early in the morning, do prayer and sing bhajans, worship her husband as ‘pati parmashwar’ (God), and take care of the whole family. She was dependent on her husband for everything. But of course, this typical stereotype was broken by a few characters in cinemas like Arth (1982), Khoon Bhari Mang (1988), Astitva (2000), Zubeidaa (2001), Provoked (2006), 7 khon Maaf (2011), NH10 (2015).

Mahesh Manjrekar’s cinema Astitva (2000) points out the issues like male prejudice, extramarital affairs, and spouse abuse. It is one of the earliest modern era cinemas which broke every sexist stereotype attached to Indian wives. It is a story of a housewife named Aditi Pandit (Tabu) whose husband’s (Sachin Khedekar as Shreekant Pandit) work keeps him away from his home for days, and this makes the wife lonely. In one instance, she had physical relationship with her music teacher (Mohnish Bahl as Malhar Kamat) and became pregnant. Twenty-Five years later, as her music teacher gave all his property to Aditi, it created doubt in her husband’s mind and forced him to take a divorce. Not to forget, the husband was also cheating on his wife. Before leaving Shreekant’s house, Aditi showed her anger by saying, “Ek baat batao, Shree, mard ka man kya aurat ke man se alag hota hai? Tan ki pyas jo tumhare sarir ko jalati hai, kya vo mere sarir ko kam jalati hai?” (Is a man’s mind

different from that of a woman? Does the appetite for sex that burns you, burns me less?). This character is about discovering and celebrating one's individuality.

Jag Mundhra's cinema *Provoked* (2006) presents another example of a wife's anger. It is based on the true story of Kiranjit Ahluwalia (Aishwarya Rai), a London based housewife from Punjab who killed her sleeping husband (Naveen Andrews as Deepak Ahluwalia) in 1989. When she was in prison, she discovered her own identity with the help of a soft-centered cellmate (Miranda Richardson). This cinema talks about a very important yet quite ignored aspect of the Indian culture, which is patriarchy and the baggage attached to it. A very thought-provoking dialogue "Ye dunia kaisi hai jisme insaaf ke liye aurat ko pagal karar diya jata hai or aadmi ke liye gussa hi kafi ha" (What kind of a world is this where in order to get justice a woman is declared mad and for a man, his anger is enough) presents the clear picture of gender discrimination.

#### IV. Depiction of Anger in Sister

Ironically, the role of sister in Indian cinema remained the perfect example of 'abla naari' (innocent-weaker sex), whose rape generally enrages her brother to take revenge. However, there are some Indian cinemas which broke the tag of 'abla naari' and made the sister's character powerful, independent and meaningful. *Fiza* (2000), *My Brother Nikhil* (2005), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013), *Sarabjit* (2016), *Hasina Parker* (2017) are some examples of strong and independent sisters.

Aishwarya Rai as Dalbir Kaur in *Sarabjit* plays a powerful role as a dutiful sister. The story begins with Dalbir's turmoil in her abusive marriage and a stillbirth baby girl for which she left her husband and stayed with her brother and family. *Sarabjit* is one of those unfortunate characters who in a drunken state crosses the border mistakenly and was imprisoned by Pakistani army, guilty of being a terrorist. For the first few years, Dalbir and her family were unaware of his whereabouts, but one day on receiving a letter from *Sarabjit*, his family and Dalbir kaur came to know about it and then a sister's journey began to free her brother. It's a story of a sister's struggle to free her brother. In order to encourage others to join in her march to free her brother, she said, "Mashaal ek ho ya ek lakh ... sirf ek chingaari ki zaroorat hai usse jalane ke liye" (Whether there is one or millions of torches ... you only need one spark to ignite them). In this journey of freeing her brother, viewers witness an angry sister, who keeps fighting with the system to free her brother. She presented her anger by saying "Begunah ko saza dena, begunah ko maut dena ... *poori insaaninat ko maut dena hai*" (To punish an innocent person, to give death to an innocent person ... is like giving death to the entire humanity).

Apoorva Lakhia's cinema *Hasina Parker* is an Indian biographical crime cinema based on a true story of Dawood Ibrahim's sister Hasina Parker. After her husband's death, she apparently took control of D-Company's operations in Mumbai following which she grabbed land, extorted money, kidnapped, and ordered killings. The cops mercilessly quizzed Hasina Parker (Sharaddha Kapoor) about her brother after her husband's death and the bomb blasts of 1993. Following a series of calls to a local police station after the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts, Parker explodes in anger at one point and yells at a senior policeman. "Ek hafte se unko waqt par khana milta hai ya nahin, mere bachche school tak sahi salaamat pahunchte hai ya nahin, kuchh nahin pata, kyunki meri galti na honey ke bavjood, main yahaan ke chakkar kaat rahi hoon" (For an entire week now, I have had no clue whether my kids are being fed or

are getting to school safe and sound, because despite being blameless I am being repeatedly summoned here). This turned her tough, and she became the guardian angel of many needy people facing injustice. She became the beloved 'Appa' (elder sister). She became a sister of not just Dawood Ibrahim but also of the downtrodden needy who put her on the wrong side of the law. She presents her aggression by saying, "Chote kaamo mein dhamkane ke liye main koi gali ka gunda nahi thi ... par mere gharwalon ko koi chot pahunchaye toh khamosh behatne ke liye main koi sant bhi nahi thi" (I'm not a cheap goon who'll threaten for small issues ... but if someone hurts my family members then I'm not a saint either who'll stay quiet). Cops torture made her more stronger, and she believed in power "Taqat se badi latt nahi hoti ... aur usko banaye rakhne ke liye koi kisi bhi hadh tak ja sakta hai" (Power is the biggest habit ... and a person can cross any limit to maintain that).

## V. Depiction of anger in Friend

The general notion has always been that two girls can never be friends and that if women are together, there will definitely be some fight. Brotherhood and male bonding has been a recurrent theme in Indian Cinema. But bonding between women was a rare sight to see. But with the recent developments in Indian cinema, one has to admit that Indian cinema fraternity has come a long way to go beyond this concept and show female friendships. A feminist sisterhood is crucial to achieve women empowerment. *Dor* (2006), *Queen* (2013), *Parched* (2015), *Angry Indian Goddesses* (2015), *Lipstick under My Burkha* (2016), *Pink* (2016), *veere di wedding* (2018) are a few cinemas which celebrates female friendships.

The debate on gender equality cannot be about 'I deserve your place'. The debate and fight is about balancing the two. However, Pan Nalin's cinema *Angry Indian Goddesses* can be considered as India's first female buddy cinema with a fresh, realistic portrait of women in India of today. It is a story of seven Indian women with the theme of women empowerment and equality. It is also a bold and loud protest against sexual harassment and rape. Within the first five minutes of the cinema, six women show their frustration and anger related to their individual life situations. After that, they all gathered in Goa, where Freida invited them for her marriage. In Goa, they had all the fun like the males do. They poured their hearts out on aspects of life like love, job, sex, men, success, grief etc. The sisterhood is presented as a protective strength for the women against patriarchal power structures. It is seen when the women are harassed (but they are together), they boldly confront the men and we see that the moment one woman leaves the group in a fit of rage, she is raped and killed. This again hints that sororal associations are important for the safety and empowerment of women. Although little clichéd the victim's friends showed their anger like Kali, the goddess of life and death and took the revenge from the rapist. "Jab Dunia main bahut pap fel jata hai, Tab Durga apna sabse ferocious form leti hai Kali, vo sara pap khatam karne ke liye." (When a lot of evil is spread around the world, Durga transforms herself in the most ferocious form i.e. Kali, to end all the evil). It shows women not as a victim but as empowered individuals who take stands for their own rights.

Aniruddha Roy Choudhury's cinema *Pink* is a story of 21st-century ladies who believes in independence, self-empowerment, and equality. This cinema has three major characters Taapsee Pannu as Minal, Kirti Kulhari as Falak, and Andrea Tariang as Andrea. The story begins with three girls going to a concert and post-concert their going for food and drink with three males to a resort, out of three males, one was their common friend. In that resort, as they were drinking, the boys have taken it for granted that as the girls were drinking with them, they were readily available to them sexually also. When one boy made advances to

Minal, even after saying no, the boy kept on harassing her; that is the moment when Minal couldn't control her anger and hit the boy very forcefully with a vase and ran away. Women are stereotyped as prostitutes if they come home late, move out of their home want to be independent, drink and so on, but none of these apply to men. In a way, 'It's too easy to blame women' or, in other words, 'Our society has no place for women'. However, the cinema highlighted that women have the right to say 'No' or 'enough is enough'. Her clothes, venue, or time should not decide her character. Their lawyer Deepak Sehgal (Amitabh Bachchan) closes the case by saying, "These boys must realize that No ka matlab No hota hai. Use bolne wali ladki koi parichit ho, friend ho, girlfriend ho, koi sex worker ho ya aapki apni biwi hi kyu na ho. 'No' means no and when someone says No, you stop." (The meaning of No is No. The girl saying it might be an acquaint, a friend, a girlfriend, a sexworker or even your own wife).

## VI. Depiction of anger in Prostitute

The theme of prostitution has been used in Indian cinema for a long time. The cinema that deals with the lives of prostitution usually portrays the tragic stories of prostitution who have passed many traumatic situations in their lives. However, there are many Indian cinemas such as Chingari (2006), Pranali – The tradition (2008), Lakshmi (2014), Begam Jaan (2017), which portrays the anger of women prostitute in different ways.

Kalpana Lajmi's cinema Chingari is a story of a prostitute Basanti (Sushmita Sen), who lives a glum life but desires to love and marry the village postman. Her desire for love and happiness is ruined by the power of the priest Bhuvan Pande (Mithun Chakraborty). Padmavati (Ila Arun) consoles Basanti by saying, "Jis maathe par ek baar kalank lag jaata hai ... wahan maang ka teeka shobha nahi deta" (A forehead that is marked with disgrace ... can't be adorned with a bindi). Initially, Basanti tolerated the tyranny of the priest, but the moment the priest desired to abuse her daughter, she shouted in anger: "Teri jubaan pe Titli ka nam fir se aaya to main isko kat lungi" (if you ever again utter Titli's name, I will cut off your tongue). Even in the end, we witness the angry prostitute taking revenge of her lover's death by killing the priest.

The nature and the magnitude of the violence that had occurred during the partition is something that will echo across generations to come. Partition has ruined many lives, and even prostitutes were not spared. Srijit Mukherji's Begum Jaan is based on how a brothel becomes an unfortunate victim of partition. The protagonist Begum Jaan, the head of the brothel house, believes that her brothel is her body, her house, her country, her rule. However, during the process of partition in 1947, the brothel house came between the radcliffe line. So, to draw the radcliffe line, the brothel house has to be destroyed, which was not accepted by Begum Jaan, and her anger came out as self-defense. She said, "Aap jise zubaan se kotha aur dimag mein randikhana soch rahe hai na ... yeh mera ghar hai, mera watan ... aur isse pehle ke koi humein yahan se hataye ... hum uske haath, pair aur jism ka woh kya kehte hai, partition kar denge" (What you're calling as a brothel and thinking as a whorehouse ... that's my house, my country ... and before anyone can remove me from here ... I'll "partition" their hands, legs, and their entire body). Begum Jaan tries to portray the power struggles of a woman in a changing political scenario which is completely controlled by men. In the end, an angry but failed Begum Jaan and her colleagues slowly step back into the burning brothel house and happily immolate themselves, thereby performing what resembles a jauhar (mass immolation) by women to avoid capture, enslavement and rape.

## VII. Conclusion

Indian cinema has used the typical damsel in distress trope for long. Society cannot bring itself to like angry women. Anger in females almost always makes men uncomfortable. Generally in most Indian cinemas, women are expected to live a quiet life where she would sacrifice and keep her emotions and frustrations in check. However, over time, the perception and attitude of women is changing in Indian cinema too. It has been noticed that Indian cinema has successfully portrayed the multi-hued female characters that have moved away from the preset stereotype of wife, vamp, sister, professional, or the ever sacrificing mother. These are flesh and blood human characters with all the nine basic emotions (as discussed before) who have stood their ground to several vagaries of time. They have also established the trend in Indian cinema to live their dreams and stand for justice. Anger in females has encouraged discourses on misogyny. The characters discussed in this paper represent the social change females want to witness in the Indian Society. These characters internalized their social responsibility to raise their voice against patriarchy, casteism, poverty and other taboos of Indian society hoping for a more equal world.

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