

**Towards New Visions: Women in Films, Media and Beyond  
Virtual Conference, 11-12 March 2021**

<http://uoguel.ph/circleconference01>

***Organizers***

Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras  
Sharada Srinivasan, University of Guelph

***Host***

Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

***Sponsor***

Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute's Golden Jubilee Conference and Lecture Series Grant (GJCLSG)



**Canada India Research  
Centre for Learning  
and Engagement**



**IIT MADRAS**  
Indian Institute of Technology Madras



**L'INSTITUT SHASTRI INDO-CANADIEN**  
**SHASTRI INDO-CANADIAN INSTITUTE**

Day 1, 11 March 2021 7: 00p.m.-12:30a.m. IST/ 8:30a.m.-2:00p.m. EST

**Opening session 7:00-7:45p.m.**

Welcome: Dr. Sharada Srinivasan, Director, CIRCLE

Introduction to the conference: Dr. Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan

Opening remarks: Dr. Charlotte Yates, President & Vice-Chancellor, University of Guelph

Opening remarks: Dr. Prachi Kaul, Director, SICI

**Plenary Session-1 8:00-9:00p.m.**

**Women's Success Stories in Films and Media**

**Chair:** Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan

✚ Aswiny Iyer Tiwari

✚ Pooja Ladha Surti

**Parallel Session-1 9:55- 11:55p.m.**

**Women's Empowerment on Screen, and New Media: Feminist Screen Cultures in the Age of Digital Technologies**

**Chair:** Madhuja Mukherjee

1. Collaborative Praxis: Feminisms and Empowerment in Contemporary Popular Bengali Cinema, Smita Bannerjee
2. Indian Women Rising: Female Star Portfolios in the Era of Digital Platforms, Akriti Rastogi
3. No Country for Aunties: A Feminist Inquiry into Intersectional Self-Fashioning in Popular Visual Culture, Shromona Das
4. Rethinking Stereotypes: Embodiment of the Female Aging Self in Select Bengali films, Debashrita Dey
5. Exonerating Disruptive Mothers and Rebellious Daughters: New Discourses of Femininity in *Shakuntala Devi* and *Tribhanga-Tedhi Medhi Crazy*, Sanchari Basu Chaudhury

**Plenary Session-2 9:10-9:45p.m.**

**Women in the Business of Production**

**Chair:** Dr. Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan

✚ Elahe Hiptoola

**Parallel session-2 9:55- 11:55p.m.**

**Gender Performativity in Films and Media**

Chair: Meena T. Pillai

1. Shadow Pandemic: Women's Married Life During the Time of Covid-19, Priyanka Tripathi
2. Feminist Fallacies in The Great Indian Kitchen, Aatika Singh
3. What is New in 'New Cinema'? Considering Gender Performativity in Kannada Films of the New Millennium, Nikhila H.
4. The Experience in/of Cinema: Gender, Politics and the Question of Representation in Recent Malayalam Films' Kavya Krishna & Vipin K Kadavath

Day 2, 12 March 2021 7:00p.m.-12:30a.m. IST/ 8:30a.m.-2:00p.m. EST

**Plenary Session-3 7:00-7:30p.m.**

Dr. Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan in conversation with Anupama Chopra

**Parallel Session-3 9:50-11:50p.m.**

**Representations of Gender Pluralism and Sexualities in Film, Media and Social Media (I)**

**Chair:** Karen Gabriel

1. Mediating Representation and Regulating Desire on Screen, Karen Gabriel
2. A Question of Violence: Women & Cinema, Shohini Ghosh
3. Mediating Gender in the Time of Corona, Meena T. Pillai
4. #MeToo and Time's Up: Slippage of Facework in Malayalam Cinema and Industry, Arya Aiyappan
5. Haptic Spatiality and Body Rights: Women's Narratives from Small Town India in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* and *Anaarkali of Aarah*, Sayanty Chatterjee

**Plenary Session-4 7:40- 8:40p.m**

**Men's Take on Women Focused Content**

**Chair:** Smita Bannerjee

- ✚ Mahesh Narayanan
- ✚ Jagan Shakti

**Parallel Session-4 9:50-11:50p.m.**

**Representations of Gender Pluralism and Sexualities in Film, Media and Social Media (II)**

**Chair:** Nikhila H

1. When and Why Men Make Women Centric Films, Maithili Rao
2. Dirty Business: An Inquiry into 'Her' Indefinite Role Film in Production, Madhuja Mukherjee
3. The Creative Producers: Guneet Monga and Rima Das, Harmanpreet Kaur
4. Producing the Vampire: Victorian Afterlives of the 'Un-Dead' and Contemporary Sexual Crime in the Cinema of Anushka Sharma, Shuhita Bhattacharjee
5. *Maa ka Pyaar Nahin Dekha*: Working Mother-Working Woman, Prabhjot Parmar

**Plenary Session-5 8:50 - 9:40p.m.**

**Women's Empowerment on Screen, and New Media:  
Feminist Screen Cultures in the Age of Digital Technologies**

**Chair:** Arya Aiyappan

- ✚ Bhavani Iyer

**Closing Session 12:00-12:20a.m.**

Concluding Reflections: Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan

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## Abstracts and Bios of speakers

Day 1, 11 March 2021

### Plenary Session 1, Women and success stories in films and media

✚ Aswiny Iyer Tiwari

Director and Screenwriter

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6436658/>

✚ Pooja Ladha Surti

Screenwriter and Editor

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1381758/>

### Plenary Session 2, Women in the Business of Production

✚ Elahe Hiptoola

Producer

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1454678/>

### Parallel Session 1, Women's Empowerment on Screen and New Media

1. Smita Bannerjee

Associate Professor, Department of English, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce.

*Collaborative Praxis: Feminism and Empowerment in contemporary Popular Bengali Cinema*

**Abstract:** This paper foregrounds a particular idea of feminist working praxis which draws upon the notion of collaboration (Govinda et al., 2020). A focus on this working praxis can be seen as a feminist subversion of the predominantly male auteurs' cult to destabilize the idea of a singular creative persona of the film director. This conceptual grid of collaborative praxis draws upon the idea of feminist gaze in cinema towards an examination of a possibility of a female authorship (Silverman, 1988) in film.

I use the above template to examine two films of the duo, Nandita Roy and Shiboprasad Mukherjee. They partner together as screenplay writer and director. Critically acclaimed and commercially successful in both India and diaspora markets they have made new inroads into the realm of meaningful content rich popular cinema in contemporary Bengali industry.

For textual analysis I shall use *Belasheshe* (At the day's end, 2015) and *Prakton* (Former, 2016). Focusing on the nuances of the women's experiences of marriages and separations, the paper will uncover the multiple axes of empowerment that are narrated in these films. I choose to read women's empowerment not necessarily tied to economic development, but also as a process of social and intellectual empowerment. The questions that I attempt to answer are: What is the definition of feminist collaborative praxis that deploys a feminist gaze? Does this praxis and its enunciation of filmic empowerment signpost an emergence of female authorship in these films? How are constructions of empowered women characters narrated as they negotiate power relations in *Prakton* and *Belasheshe*?

2. Akriti Rastogi

PhD Candidate, Research Scholar, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University

*Indian Women Rising: Female Star Portfolios in the era of digital platforms*

**Abstract:** Using the case study of Indian Women Rising and Instagram accounts of film professionals, this paper will locate the origins of the first female lead cinema collective of the Hindi film industry. In an interview with Anupama Chopra, Guneet Monga stated that less than five per cent of the film

industry professionals were women. Additionally, the film and media industries in India are increasingly platformized (Athique and Parthasarathi, 2019). As a result, filmmakers, crew members and film stars need to have an active social media presence. These social media accounts showcase the 'glamorous' work in the industry. In 2017, with the MeToo movement finding its feet in film industries of India, Women in cinema collective was found - primarily by the film and media professionals of the Malayalam and Tamil film industries. However, my field interactions in the Hindi film industry at the time suggested that this movement may not work as well for Bollywood's precarious 'portfolio careers'. Unlike the warning listicles of perpetrators created by female news media professionals, the Hindi film industry professionals did not indulge in list making endeavors. The irony of this moment was the duality of the usage of social media accounts. On one hand, female film professionals capitalized on these platforms to generate glamorous online portfolios, on the other hand, they also shared stories of discrimination in the workplace. This shift in platform appropriation has reorganized stardom in the Hindi film industry - particularly for female film professionals. Thus, this paper will outline the transitions and setbacks as an outcome of the MeToo movement for the Hindi film industry professionals.

### 3. Shromona Das

Research Scholar, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University

*No Country for Aunties: A Feminist Inquiry into Intersectional Self-Fashioning in Popular Visual Culture*

Abstract: This presentation is a feminist enquiry into the political afterlife of a Brahminic patriarchal aesthetic that dominated popular Hindu imagination since the 1960s: Amar Chitra Katha. Amar Chitra Katha not only popularised Hindu mythologies amongst the Indian middleclass, but also played a crucial role in creating a visual culture to aid Hindu masculinity (Sreenivas, 2019). The depiction of female characters in Amar Chitra Katha, while borrowing heavily from the visual style of popular American comics from the Golden Age, demarcated the gendered roles of the ideal Hindu woman. They were always caught in a dichotomy of desire and chastity: while on one hand these women are modelled after the Pin Up girls (Chandra, 2008), they are also the representatives of the ideal, chaste and therefore desirable womanhood.

My presentation looks at the aesthetic tradition of Amar Chitra Katha as the patriarchal reference point of a plethora of contemporary feminist artworks. In doing so, I look at popular feminist poster arts on social media platforms, such as Instagram which use the hybrid visuality of Pop Art and Amar Chitra Katha at the same time. In both western, canonical Pop Art and in Amar Chitra Katha, the celebrated artists have always been men. The artworks I wish to discuss are not only primarily made by women, queer and gender non-normative artists, but are also largely associated with intersectional feminism on social media. What happens when a historically patriarchal (visual) language is used to challenge patriarchy? I would like to do a feminist inquiry into the representation of (brown) women in these visuals and the newly emerging archetypes and stereotypes within this visual language. In doing so, I will discuss the works of Maria Qamar, Chitra Ganesh, @ppopliart, Aashita Relan among others and their (self) positioning of the figure of the intersectional, brown feminist artist.

### 4. Debashrita Dey

Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Patna

*Rethinking Stereotypes: Embodiment of the Female Aging Self in Select Bengali films*

Abstract: Representation of 'woman' as a spectacle continues to pervade across visual cultures with predominant male gaze perceiving the 'eternal feminine' to be dwelling in the domestic space, expected to find fulfilment in the biological essence of motherhood and the spiritual one in her later years. In the Indian context, this shift from real to reel space is distinctly marked by such stereotypical portrayal of women who vehemently conceal their personality and priorities. This phenomenon leads to older women being oddly invisible on the silver screen. Thus, aging for women in various narratives

gets significantly associated with sheer bodily decline and evident loss of selfhood and Indian cinema replicating the same engendering process have relegated the aged women in the subordinate roles representing them as 'sacred' or de-sexed bodies. Trapped within this liminal state, they are often projected to renounce worldly pleasures and this binds aging within a set of severe definitions and ridicules those women who do not fit in within such codes of rectitude and chastity. The dismissive gaze of dominant culture and socially devised code of practices held appropriate for the aging females tend to delimit her subjectivity and her fragile body appears as a site where cultural anxieties unfold themselves. Therefore, diverging from the traditional youthful representation of female bodies in popular culture, this presentation intends to analyse Aparna Sen's – *Paromitar Ek Din* (House of Memories, 2000) and Goynar Baksho (*The Jewellery Box*, 2013). While exploring these films one realizes of how the dismissive gaze of the dominant culture and the socially devised code of practices held appropriate for the aging females tend to delimit her subjectivity and her fragile body appears as a site where cultural anxieties unfold themselves. That the senile female body has found negligible representation in cinema calls for an understanding how the otherness of senescence affects the 'Other' and steers our gaze to recognize how the represented decline onscreen gets interpreted through her lived experiences.

5. Sanchari Basu Chaudhury

PhD scholar, Dept of Sociology, Jamia Milia University, New Delhi

*Exonerating Disruptive Mothers and Rebellious Daughters: New Discourses of Femininity in Shakuntala Devi*

Abstract: The discourse around motherhood in Bollywood movies revolves around the docile, sacrificing and chaste mother. In the absence of the father, she also takes upon the financial responsibility and protective roles with reference to her children. Moreover, she also upholds the honor of her family and community. The daughters, in such movies, are obedient and conform to traditions. In case of any defiance, the daughter is usually punished in the narrative through some misfortune as a consequence of her actions.

The mother-daughter duo in *Shakuntala Devi* (2020) and *Tribhanga-Tedhi Medhi Crazy* (2021), released digitally due to Covid-19, overturns the previous discourses around these social roles. While the mother-daughter duo in *Shakuntala Devi* draws upon the realistic account of the mathematical genius *Shakuntala Devi* and her daughter, *Tribhanga* is fictional but has been inspired from many unconventional family setups portrayed through three generations of women. The narratives of these movies depict the inter-generational conflicts around unconventional choices and lifestyles of mothers which impacts their daughters. While the daughters nurse their grudges towards their disruptive mothers, they are able to understand their mothers' choices only after their turn towards maternity. The paper identifies two parallel strategies which exonerates the mother and/or the daughter. Firstly, the identity of the mother is established as a woman/human by dissociating her from the pedestal of motherhood. Secondly, the daughters' upbringing is validated through their recourse to conventional family setups and their choice of husbands. The paper discusses this "hybrid" strategy of women's empowerment and emancipation within the patriarchal structures in contemporary Bollywood movies.

## **Parallel Session 2, Gender Performativity in Films and Media**

1. Priyanka Tripathi

Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Patna

*Shadow Pandemic: Women's Married Life During the Time of Covid-19*

Abstract: Diseases, virus based or other, do not necessarily discriminate much between male or female bodies while infecting; but within the uneven foundations of social structures in South Asian countries intersecting within and beyond the dynamics of caste, class, space and most importantly gender; even pandemics, epidemics, and other calamities do generate unequal vulnerabilities. Based on such observations, this presentation intends to conduct a gendered analysis of structure and culture of gender violence in India during the times of Covid-19 with particular reference to female's position in a martial set-up. The recent outbreak of the pandemic has compelled the entire human population to survive on the brink of uncertainty and the subsequent lockdown has witnessed an upsurge in the cases of domestic abuse across the globe making us realize how the four walls of the familial space turned into a hotbed of the 'shadow pandemic' resulting from the socio-economic and individual frustration during these difficult times. The social isolation with its reduced social support network has further accentuated this major problem of domestic violence and this presentation discusses two short films Falguni Thakore's *The Relationship Manager* (2020) and Hridaye Nagpal's *Step Out* (2021) which explore the intimate effect of physical and emotional pain that woman as an individual suffer as a result of violence they meet at home

2. Aatika Singh

Student, School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU

*Feminist Fallacies in The Great Indian Kitchen*

Abstract: In the pantheon of Indian cinema, men's take on women focused content is part of a larger debate on ethical representation and feminist concerns. Jeo Baby, director of the acclaimed, 'The Great Indian Kitchen' has delivered a much anticipated project on the kitchen as a site of gendered labour and the ties thereof with issues of identity and emancipation. This film essentially feels like a modern rendition of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). It builds upon a version analysis of the similar set of liberal feminist trope of Ibsen. As an analogous conclusion to the play; the female protagonist exits the space of the house, both spatially and metaphorically in the film and is shown to finally become a career oriented woman.

The juxtaposition of a male directed film on a women centric issue that essentially borrows from realism of a famed male playwright creates a consciousness that results in the framing of gender roles and family values through an andocentric gaze. The solution posed at the end of exiting through a tragic display of defeat at the altar of the kitchen and the house and hence choosing the career over domesticity reeks of a lack of pragmatic concession to any imagination of an egalitarian alternative to issues of labour and gender in cinematic portrayal. The provocative debates about the society we inhabit then get largely shaped by male interventions.

The paper engages in feminist reinterpretation by looking at few examples of feminist films and critiques this construction of (false) emancipation.

3. Nikhila H

Professor, Dept. of Film Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

*What is New in 'New Cinema'? Considering Gender Performativity in Kannada Films of the New Millennium*

Abstract: Scholars such as Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram (2018) have begun speaking of 'India's New Independent Cinema', to borrow from the title of his first book, or more glowingly describe a 'New Independent Cinema Revolution' that is beyond Bollywood, to paraphrase his second title, which is an edited volume, and which has essays among others from Marathi, Tamil, north-eastern languages, not to speak of Hindi cinema as well. This 'new'ness is also visible in contemporary Kannada cinema, particularly in films of the second decade of the new millennium. This 'New Cinema' is not to be confused with the New Wave or Parallel Cinema or Art cinema in Kannada that was in vogue in the 1970s to the 90s (and becoming less frequent thereafter) that was to a large extent funded by



Government bodies like FFC/NFDC. A host of Kannada films particularly in the second decade of the new millennium - most of them directed by first time directors, working with a new crew and cast of actors, almost completely bypassing the star-system in Kannada, crowdfunding or depending on first-time producers for financing their films, reaching their films out to an audience that is not necessarily only Kannadigas, or those residing within Karnataka, premiering their films abroad or taking them to international film festivals, -are ushering in this 'New cinema' in Kannada. Film-goers have identified at least 20-30 films in the last decade that are different from the other Kannada films made during this period, and that share many of above-mentioned features. Given the larger context of globalization which is bringing about greater migration (both internally and internationally) and integration of media and markets, as well as neoliberalism that is creating new subjectivities, the present paper 1) maps the emergence and recurrence of particular kinds of characters in these films [e.g. the female journalist in films like *Ulidavaru Kandante* (As seen by the rest, 2014), *Hombanna* (2017), *U-turn* (2016), *Shuddhi* (Purgation, 2017) and *Rangitaranga* (Colourful wave, 2015)] as indicative of new subjectivities and 2) tracks gender performativity to see what forms/norms of masculinity and femininity are being constituted in the process.

4. Kavya Krishna & Vipin K Kadavath

Dept. of English, BHU, Varanasi

*The Experience in/of Cinema: Gender, Politics and the Question of Representation in Recent Malayalam Films*

**Abstract:** This paper will look at a few recent Malayalam films that have created a sensation and received accolades for the courage and sincerity with which it presented the unavowed reality of patriarchal household. (*Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), *Vaanku* (2021), *Halal Love Story* (2020) etc.) The comments, reviews and other kinds of writings published on the social media by women after the release of some of these films on OTT platforms were not exactly looking closely at the film-text as an object of aesthetic appreciation. They were memoirs or reflections where the authors took an opportunity to look at the personal life experiences. In many ways it was very close to the 'me too' movement where the social media flooded with such experiential notes – indicating new ways of forging continuity of concerns between what these films represent and the social media as a site of production of memory/knowledge. Taking gender as the central issue for analysis, the paper will demonstrate that there is a new crisis of representation that these films address, in which the question is no more whether cinema can take up the task of representing 'reality', but if art can, in its crisis and historical transformation, really *do politics* (Ranciere 2004). In such a context of representational crisis these films take up the task of challenging and reformulating some of the symbolic resolutions that have come down to us as the legacy of nationalist discourse with regard to gender and women's place in society. (Chatterjee 1993) Thus the paper will argue, the institution and representational paradigm of cinema, coupled with newer forms of communication such as the internet, is producing a new sense of the 'real' and its modes of experience.

**Day 2, 12 March 2021**

**Plenary Session 3**

✚ Anupama Chopra

Writer, Film critic, Actress

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3090468/>

**Plenary Session 4, Men's Take on Women Focused Content**

✚ Mahesh Narayanan

Film Director, Editor Writer

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3525879/>

✚ Jagan Shakti

Director, Writer

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5579635/>

**Plenary Session 5, Women's Empowerment on Screen, and New Media: Feminist Screen Cultures in the Age of Digital Technologies**

✚ Bhavani Iyer

Screenwriter

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1818188/>

**Parallel Session 3, Representations of Gender Pluralism and Sexualities in Film, Media and Social Media (I)**

1. Karen Gabriel

Associate Prof, Dept of English, St Stephen's College, New Delhi

*Mediating Representation and Regulating Desire on Screen*

Abstract:

2. Shohini Ghosh

Professor, AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

*A Question of Violence: Women & Cinema*

Abstract: The question of cinematic violence and women has always been vexed regardless of whether the latter are victims or perpetrators. This presentation mediates on this question at a moment when cinematic-image making emerges from the multiple folds of rapidly proliferating streaming platforms, vibrant cultures of piracy and a desire to see and show gender non-conforming protagonists. This has resulted in a number of female protagonists storming cinematic genres that have traditionally been the bastion of men. Consequently, the pleasures of cinematic retribution have been wrested away from proxy avengers who, barring some notable exceptions, have mostly been men. In this gender bending re-imagining of violence, the presentation deliberates on cinema's ability to articulate women's rage returning us to the provocation extended by Sean French that one of the "dark pleasures" of film-going, is that we respond to vitality and not morality and Marco Abel's reminder that the question is not "what does it mean" but "what does it do?"

3. Meena T. Pillai

Prof, Dept of English, University of Kerala

*Mediating Gender in the Time of Corona*

Abstract: The age of the pandemic has made the motif of the virus central to the frames with which we look at and make sense of the world around us. As an intrusive body that undermines a system from within, the term 'virus' becomes a metaphor for a number of contentious social dilemmas that rapidly spread within a system and oppress it with dis-ease. The metaphor of the deadly virus thus aptly applies to those structures of patriarchy that seem to be haunting the everyday like never before in the age of the pandemic. The changing textures of patriarchy in the past decades, in which the nature of 'the social' has been considerably altered by the digitalisation of the everyday, emerges as a complex new moment in which the pandemic becomes the inevitable new optic through which to view some of the fraught debates regarding gender and patriarchy. This paper turns a gendered lens to the pandemic and the subsequent turn to the digital, looking at what this turn means for those marginalised by virtue of their sex, gender or sexual orientations, and their representation in cinema and new media.

#### 4. Arya Aiyappan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Christ University

*#MeToo and Time's Up: Slippage of Facework in Malayalam Cinema and Industry*

Abstract: #MeToo and Time's Up movements, the collective voice of trauma, solidarity and resistance appropriated world over, impacted India a decade since its inception. In the globalized Indian space, the movements evolved / were transplanted in different realms, lashing against democracy's tacit silence. Finding resonance in the Indian cinema industry, many women articulated their trauma and protest in a fraternity, broadminded in spirit, patriarchal at heart. An evolutionary reading of #MeToo and Time's Up movements as independent / extension of its predecessor with distinctive focus on Malayalam cinema and industry foregrounds riveting issues. Malayalam cinema industry, a case in point is popular for its projected broad-minded outlook through films. Discursive readings unravel the inconsistencies and pluralistic divergent voices in this 'progressive' industry, challenging its liberal positioning. With the tag of an industry receptive to ambient changes how does its films become reflective or mutually inclusive? How does the industry's 'facework' feed into the apparently challenging onscreen representations vis-a-vis the offscreen power hierarchies? Who delineates the 'boundary-work' within the industry and cinema? A complementary reading of the onscreen vs offscreen negotiations problematizes the gendered relationships, sexual economies, collective consciousness structured along multiple tangents. Understanding the ongoing confrontation between artistes' associations like 'Association of Malayalam Movie Artistes' (AMMA) and 'Women's Collective in Cinema', negotiation of inclusivity and extension of solidarity, together with the appropriations and assimilations have opened an alternative space to examine the grey areas dotting the silver screen.

#### 5. Sayanty Chatterjee

Research Scholar, Dept of HSS, IIT Madras

*Haptic Spatiality and Body Rights: Women's Narratives from Small town India in Dum Laga Ke Haisha and Anaarkali of Aarah*

Abstract: This paper aims to interrogate the equation between the female body and the space in the two cinematic representations of small town India, namely *Dum Laga ke Haisha* (2015) and *Anaarkali of Aarah* (2017). The ensuing attitudinal shift brought forth by the combined effect of globalization and a 'localized' focus in the universe of Hindi cinema, has facilitated the portrayal of the women characters as the agents of social change (Shandilya, 2017). While *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015) presents a 'subversive discourse of [the] destigmatization' of a female body, in *Anaarkali of Aarah*, the concept of consent has been upheld through the body politics played out on an erotic folk dancer, thereby shattering the prevalent notions and assumptions about the female body (Singh, 2018). This paper would delve into the nuances of claiming one's rights over one's body in a 'haptic' spatiality of a small

town space and how the negotiation and challenge of the individual with the larger social system breaks down several stereotypical social barriers (Rajinder Dudrah, 2014). Through a close textual analysis of the *mise-en-scène*, we will focus on implications of the position of women with respect to her body and sexuality in the macrocosm of the society and discern its relationship with the space in the mediated representation of the said films. This study is also interested in dealing with the manifestation of the consciousness of 'body positivity' message among the larger audience of popular contemporary Bollywood.

#### **Parallel Session 4, Representations of Gender Pluralism and Sexualities in Film, Media and Social Media (II)**

1. Maithili Rao

Film Critic

*When and Why Men Make Women Centric Films*

**Abstract:** Call it patriarchy's guilt or enlightened men righting historical wrongs. Landmark women centric films have been helmed by men with vision. *Duniya Na Mane, Mother India, Bandini, Bhumika, Mirch Masala* bequeath a historic legacy. Except for *Mother India* that makes the matriarch upholder of patriarchal dharma, all others are about rebels with a cause.

The new millennium continues this tradition with significant films that make woman the hero. Jagan Shakti's *Mission Mangal* makes the senior woman scientist the catalyst and executor of a project senior male scientists dismiss as mission impossible. Akshay Kumar is the titular leader, but it is the team of women who take on the professional challenge while coping with demanding personal issues. Vidya Balan of *Kahani*, directed by Sujoy Ghosh who seamlessly weaves an ode to Kolkata into a taut thriller, undertakes the archetypal hero's solo journey. She is on the perilous trail of a traitor who crossed over to the dark side and accomplishes it with extraordinary intelligence and courage.

Aniruddha Roy Choudhury transforms *Pink* into an emphatic reiteration of a woman's right to say No, in a conservative society that considers modern, sociable young women easy prey. Working women living on their own in a metro problematically need a saviour – Amitabh Bachchan's astute lawyer – to fight the power structure stacked against them. Shoojit Sircar's delightfully acerbic *Piku* salutes an independent daughter who takes care of her exasperating, self-absorbed father with tough love. Her no nonsense affection makes her an equal, far from the stereotypical submissive daughter.

2. Madhuja Mukherjee

Associate Prof, Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

*Dirty Business: An inquiry into 'her' indefinite role film in production*

**Abstract:** It is not unknown that during the early period of Bombay cinema actresses -- namely Fatma Begum, Jaddan Bai, Sabita Devi, Ratan Bai, and particularly more illustrious figures like Devika Rani, Sadhana Bose and others -- had successfully ventured into film production. However, what by and large transpired during the studio era and its aftermath, with the emergence of individual and towering filmmakers/ producers like Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Anand Brothers et al, is the complex dynamics between the patriarchal structure of the industry, networks of kinship, camaraderie between (male) authors, technicians, workers, and inflow of private and petty capital. Additionally, while big 'female' stars, for instance Hema Malini, Anushka Sharma, Deepika Padukone, Priyanka Chopra et al, have been invested in film production over the decades, it is only in recent times that some women have functioned and evolved as 'producers' and 'HOD's per se. In this context, Ekta Kapoor, the managing director and creative head of Balaji Telefilms Ltd., shines like a candle in the wind, although other actresses turned producers, for example Juhi Chawla and Pooja Bhatt, have collaborated impressively and have been involved with film production for a long period.

This paper, nonetheless, *does not* intend to present any concise account of such histories, or argue about the alternative narratives ‘women’ producers may have generated. Contrarily, by referring to an audio-visual interview of the producer-director Kiran Rao (conducted by the author in February 2020), this paper raises certain critical and conceptual questions about ‘women’s networks’. First, I analyze in what ways such networks are activated, and specific roles essayed by women in film production; furthermore, I enquire how following the corporatization of Bombay cinema, and its expanding linkages with TV and other media industries, women have re-emerged as producers (as well as executive producers and line producers). Secondly, I particularly examine how certain types of jobs were regularly assigned to women – like those in the costume department, hairdressing – and the ways in which at present, there are more women at work in departments such as choreography, makeup, assistant to HODs etc., compared to what used to be the norm a couple of decades earlier. I specifically study whether the gender demography of the industry is shifting with the changes in the nature of capital (from private investments to productions controlled by MNCs in the times of *Bollywood*), and thereby, I highlight ‘her’ complicated association with ‘Capital’.

### 3. Harmanpreet Kaur

Assistant Professor, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai  
*The Creative Producers: Guneet Monga and Rima Das*

Abstract: This paper-presentation analyses the role of women as producers in filmmaking in India through the figures of Guneet Monga and Rima Das. The role and position of women as directors, actors, screenwriters or even editors and cinematographers in a largely male-dominated film industry in India has been a subject of study since colonial India (Mukherjee, 2020). However, it would be relevant to look at some of their work as producers in contemporary Indian cinemas, and in the case of Monga and Das, alternative and independent cinemas where the access to traditional kinship networks and corporate finance is limited. Here, the role of the producer is not only to provide and source finance for funding a film, but also provide creative inputs and find innovative ways for funding, production and distribution of cinema. Monga’s *Sikhya Films* and Das’ *Flying River Films* also signify the rise of independent production houses that are making it possible for alternative films to be produced as well as distributed through various collaborations within the mainstream industry, government platforms like NFDC’s Film Bazaar in Goa and access to international funding and wider industry collaborations. They are creative producers working in Hindi (Monga) and Assamese (Das) language cinemas involved in the entire filmmaking process – from pitch, to script to screen while positioning themselves as a part of ‘global’ filmmaking cultures. The presentation will analyse their feminist interventions and labour not only within mainstream film industries of India but also transnationally.

### 4. Shuhita Bhattacharjee

Assistant Prof, Dept of Liberal Arts, IIT Hyderabad  
*Producing the Vampire: Victorian Afterlives of the ‘Un-Dead’ and Contemporary Sexual Crime in the Cinema of Anushka Sharma*

Abstract: In my paper, I examine two films co-produced by Anushka Sharma, *Bulbul* (2020) and *Pari* (2018), to understand the nineteenth-century afterlife of the trope of vampirism that they portray and that becomes a metaphor for the representation for anxieties surrounding sexual violence in the current historical moment in South-Asia. A large body of scholarship in the area of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies analyses at great length the ways in which the figure of the vampire in the fiction and non-fiction of the time represented fears of immigration, sexual promiscuity, and moral degeneration. With respect to Sharma’s cinema, I will argue that it is significant how the cinema of a female producer, working within a charged post-Nirbhaya and post-#MeToo context in India, draws on the power of the vampiric metaphor to dramatize the fears of sexual violence. In *Pari*, the

eponymous character whose natural instinct is to vampirically devour other life forms, is herself a product of the rape of her mother by Ifrit (a male demonic entity, invisible except as a silhouette during the act of rape). Similarly, in *Bulbbul*, the titular character emerges in vampiric form after she has been raped by her brother-in-law and kills those who have been known to assault and exploit women. In a disorienting variety of the otherwise familiar forms of Victorian afterlife, vampirism is showcased by this South-Asian female producer as the only feasible and fitting response to sexual violence in a world beset with indifference at best and hostility at worst when it comes to redressing this rampant crime. The nineteenth-century vampire, or the 'un-dead' as the entity is commonly called in Victorian fiction, literally becomes a metaphor for the violent reality of sexual violence that refuses to die down and that can only be eviscerated through visceral and vampiric consumption.

5. Prabhjot Parmar

Associate Prof, Fraser Valley University, Canada

*Maa ka Pyaar Nahin Dekha: Working Mother-Working Woman*

Abstract: