

Women Breaking the Gender Stereotypes: Kalindi and Reena In *Lust Stories*

Sasithorn Raweesawad

*Research scholar at Department of Humanities, School of Humanities & Social Sciences
Babu Banarasi Das University, Lucknow, (Uttar Pradesh) India*

Dr. Archana Durgesh Verma

Associate Professor, Babu Banarasi Das University, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)

Abstract

Woman has been under limitation of being ‘woman.’ Her freedom is limited under the patriarchal society and man’s power. They cannot express themselves as much as they would like to. This paper focuses on the struggles of women who would like to come out of their place and be able to be themselves. It is an analysis of the characters from select two short film directed by Anurag Kashyap and Dibakar Banerjee from the film *Lust Stories*.

Key Words: feminism, patriarchal, Lust Stories

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”¹ – Simone de Beauvoir’s formulation distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. [...] *sexis* understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, whereas *gender* is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body’s acculturation. (Butler)

Judith Butler has stated in her work *Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex* the above quote about how gender and sex are different from each other. Sex depends on one’s biologically body whereas gender is when one acquired from various factors including the culture and how society treats them. There is gender discrimination in patriarchal societies in several aspects. As said by the renowned sociologists Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is “a system of social structure

and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. Woman has been exploited and treated as a subjugated class in the society. They cannot express or expose their desires without restrictions from customs and culture. Woman has to act according to the social norms; which are a boundary for them and keep their true self within the box of ‘good culture’.

Women exploitation is an age-old circumstance in the Indian community. Exploitation is in the sense of opportunity to expose themselves to the actual world apart from the world that their father or husband allows them to. There are various field of women exploitation in India including domestic violence, female infanticide or feticide, and dowry. Education is another factor that has been a mark of discrimination between man and woman. The man used to have a higher chance to study and build their career opportunities more than woman.

Woman has to live her life as the possession of her father whereas after

marriage, woman becomes the possession of her husband. Husband holds superiority in the marital relationship while the woman is expected to be taking care of the household and family members and condition. The woman also expects to be under the surveillance of the husband more over wife is supposed to ask permission from their husband in order to do anything. The decision making relies solely on the husband. Women do not belong to her birth family after marriage.

Freedom is another element that has been restricted from woman. Male gains more freedom than female. As a man, one can express himself and is allowed to exposure to the world. For example, in Shashi Deshpande's *Dark holds No Terrors*, the discrimination between son and daughter is shown in the female protagonist, Sarita's mother dialogue:

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker / Who cares? / We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married / I don't want to get married / Will you live with us for all your life? / Why not? / You can't? / And Dhruva? / He is different. He is a boy (Deshpande)

From the dialogue, it can be analyzed as son has been given more liberty than a daughter. It reflects the nature of patriarchal culture in Indian society. Likewise the freedom to express sexual desire is also subdued in woman. It is considered women to be shameless if they express their passion in public or to other people unlike man who can express their sexual desire freely. Fiction is not the only genre of art that reflect the reality of the society and culture.

“Film is a reflection of society, both present and past” (Shah), said by Tom Sheraton, President of the Academy of Motion Picture Art and Sciences in his interview. Furthermore he also states that “[...] movies are about escapism.[...] They tell us things we never could have known. They tell us things we might not know, and they give us a way to explore the past, the present and the future.” Film reflects the actual reality to the people in the society more vividly than fictions as it contains several elements including motion and sound which makes people can relate themselves to it easily.

Films are based on numbers of genres and feminism is also one of the themes that the film portrays to the audiences. In modern era, the themes of film are more widely open for the film makers to take up as their subject to highlight their works. As a result, on June 15, 2018, a collection of four short films from collaboration of four notable Hindi directors i.e. Karan Johar, Zoya Akhtar, Anurag Kashyap, and Dibakar Banerjee was released on Netflix as original film *Lust Stories*.

The main theme of this film is about the women's desire portraying via different female protagonists via four different stories. Each story has highlighted on divergent issues of women in Indian society and focusing on expressing their sexual desire and about the marriage life and relationship between husband and wife. In this paper we will focus on the story directed by Anurag Kashyap and Dibakar Banerjee. These two stories contrast on different images and perspectives of Indian women. Though there are some common characteristics between the two women yet there are also

variation in their personalities and mentality.

The first story is directed by Anurag Kashyap starring Radhika Apte and Akash Thosar. The woman Apte as Kalindi, a college teacher who is having an affair with her own student, Tejas (Akash Thosar). This story depicts a restlessness and limitations of a woman to express or even accept the reality about her own desires. Kalindi is already married but her husband is far away as Kalindi herself mentions in the film that '*Mihir aur me. We have a long distance relationship.*' She is having the sexual intercourse with the student. However she refuses to accept her own desires towards Tejas yet does not let him go nor let him get closer to her. Though their actual age varied but Kalindi's mental stage seems to be only a bit mature than Tejas.

In the beginning of the story, Kalindi expresses her anxiety by asking Tejas that '*Accha kal jo raatko hua accha tha na. There is fun right. It's a natural thing right.*' (What happened last night was good, right?) She also tell Tejas that '*Koi pyar vyar nahi ho jaega zyada sochana nahi. Let's not make a big deal out of it*' (you won't fall in love, right? Don't overthink about it.) Kalindi refers to what her husband, Mihir's words:

'Mihir ne mushje bataya tha ki ladkoka problem yaha haina wo sex gebad ekdum emotional ho jata and then unko pyaar ho jata and then you know they get obsessed and they start stalking you. [...] I just don't understand why they can't separate between the two' (Mihir told me that guys tend to get emotional after sex and they fall in love).

To the contrary with what Kalindi discusses with the audience, she herself can neither separate nor deal with her own feeling towards Tejas. She starts overthinking and stalking her student and does all that she had told Tejas not to do. Throughout the story, the audience can observe that the level of anxiety of the character Kalindi is increasing due to various circumstances. For instance the custom and social judgments which reflects in the scene when Kalindi's colleague talking about the news of American teacher who has a sexual affair with a student who has not yet reached the age of consent and her husband divorced her. Which makes Kalindi worry and rush to Tejas to record his voice that the thing happened between them was 'consensual'.

From the beginning to end of the short film Kalindi speaks monologue addressing the audience. This monologue reveals that Kalindi herself does not have her own experiences about many things but she is learning from whatever Mihir had told her including about his experiences on the relationship between man and woman. This might be the reason behind Kalindi's behavior about her relationship with Tejas as well as the mathematics teacher, Neeraj with whom she had a short term relationship and then broke up. In one of the monologue she mentions that '*Agar me Mihir se pyaar karti hu Aur agar socho ki main Tejasse bhi pyaar karti hu.* (I love Mihir and I love Tejas too.) *What is wrong with that?*' It shows that Kalindi wants to have same liberty in having relationship which man has. It also can be interpreted that she wants to experience herself in relationship as her husband has. It is a form of revenge that she does not have a chance to expose herself in relationship

after marriage and free from her boundaries. As she is now living alone on her own without husband and family members. Hence she feels free to live her life to the extreme of it.

In the third story which is directed by Dibakar Banerjee which focuses on the theme of adultery and unhappy marriage. This story is starring by Jaideep Ahlawat as Sudhir, Manisha Koirala as Reena, and Sanjay Kapoor as Salman. Sudhir is a dominant husband who exercises his assertive power over his wife Reena. As a result Reena is having an extra-marital affair with Salman's best friend, Sudhir. In the short film, Salman calls his best friend to consult about his wife's strange behavior and suggesting that he want to get out of this situation and he mentions that he could not contact his wife as well as suspects that she is having an extra marital affair. Salman also tells Sudhir that '*Terah saal ki married life me sirf gyarah mahina bore nahi kuja* (In thirteen years of our marriage, she was happy for only 11 months)'. In this scene Salman ask Sudhir to witness that his wife will not be taking the call from him but Sudhir asks Reena to callback Salman. By any chance, Reena says that '*Tum Sudhir phone kar sakte musjhe nahi* (You can call Sudhir but not me)' On the grounds of this situation, it is suggested that Sudhir is staying with Reena as she receives the call just after Salman calls Sudhir, thus Salman's might already solve his hypothesis about his wife having an affair with his best friend. As it reveals later that Salman already checks with Reena's friend says that Reena is not at her friend as Reena informs him. In addition to this Geeta, Reena's friend that she says that so go over her place tells Salman that '*Mujhe nahi pata ki tumhare*

aur Reena ke beech me kya chal raha hai par Reena yaha nahi (Things are not okay between you both and that she is not here)'

From this incident Reena becomes restless that Sudhir already suspects her adultery. She decides to tell her husband that she is at Sudhir's beach house and lies about the reason she came to his house before the house warming party. At first Reena and Salman are having a conversation via phone call and it reveals that Salman is a type of self-centered man who is typically representative of a patriarchal man. He is talking about how he earns the money to support his family while Reena earns less money than him as she just a bank employee. He also declares that he is the one who is paying for the loan of her dad. These statements make Reena feels like an object instead of a human being. She utters that '*whether it's me, Kishore or beach house tumhare paas trophies collect karani hai. It all about you Salman.* (Kishore, the beach house and me. We are trophies to you! It all about you Salman.) Furthermore Salman also states during the fight that:

... Na karo toh tum kya karogi (What will you do if I stop collecting them?)/ *Main apni life lead karungi aur kya* (I will live my live) / *Kya hai tumhare life Branch Manager, MG Road ... Kya hai life tumhari. Tumhari life wo hai Reena jo main permit karu aur kuch life hai tumhari ... Kya hai life tumhari mere bina* (What is it about? Branch Manager, MG Road! Tell me. What is its worth? Your life is what I permit it to be. Nothing more. What kind of life will you have without me?)

This statement reflects the superiority of a husband over wife. Once man and woman get into relationship, man treats woman as his possessions; who needs to take permission from him in order to do anything. As in the short film Salman tells Reena that she needs to take permission from him to live her own life. It represents the actual reality that woman in Indian society has to face. Woman is treated as an object which frame the boundary for woman and suppress them within it. Reena says ‘... *tightness din raat rahate hai tumhe biwi nahi maa chahiye nahi hota mushje* (I feel stuck. You need mother not wife. I can’t do this). As a result, Reena wants to escape from her husband suppression and take revenge by having an affair with his own best friend. However she cannot completely escape from the man’s power as it reflects in a scene when Reena tells Sudhir that she asks Salman to come over as she want to tell the truth to him. Sudhir becomes angry and states that, ‘*kaise kar sakte yaar You have no right.*’ Even in this situation Sudhir says that Reena does not have her right in making decisions about her own life. It is like Reena jumps out of the frying pan into the fire.

Toward the end of the short film Reena herself tells Salman about her three years old relationship with Sudhir. However

Salman decides not to tell Sudhir that he already knows about his affair with Reena by pretending he knows nothing. On the contrary Reena is the one who reveals the truth to Sudhir that Salman is aware about them by giving two condition i.e. they will end the relationship or Sudhir will not come to know about Salman’s awareness of their affair. In the end Reena satisfactorily smiles for the first time in the film as she feels free that she could now take her revenge by disobeying her husband’s order.

From these two short film from *Lust Stories*, the two female protagonists have their way to escape from the patriarchal society. Though they are educated women yet they are trapped within the boundaries of being ‘women’. They have been suppressed by their own family as well as the environment around them. As Kalindi has to think about how others will feel or talk about her if she do some certain acts. Reena has to think about her daughters and chose to be with her self-center husband. This film highlights about the status of women in Indian society in different perspectives by focusing more on ‘woman’s desire’ yet it also portrays how different women handle their problem that they cannot turn their face to, and how they break the gender stereotypes- that sex and lustful desires are a man’s prerogative.

Reference:

- Butler, J. (1986). Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex. Yale French Studies, (72), p.35.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Penguin Books, 1990.
- “Gender Inequality in India - Concept, Causes and Types.” *IndiaCelebrating.com*, 17 Feb. 2018, www.indiacelebrating.com/social-issues/gender-inequality-in-india/.
- K, Nirmala. “Concept of A Liberated Woman feminism in Indian Context: A Comparative Study of Female Characters of K. Saraswathy Amma, Kamala Das,

Shashi Deshpande And Bharati Mukherjee.” Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, 1996, pp. 1–17.

- Kashyap, Anurag, et al., directors. *Lust Stories*. Netflix, 2018, www.netflix.com/title/80991033.
- Naahar, Rohan. “Lust Stories Movie Review: Netflix’s New Film Undresses Repressed Indian Sexuality.” Hindustan Times, www.hindustantimes.com/movie-reviews/lust-stories-movie-review-netflix-s-new-film-undresses-repressed-indian-sexuality/story-4UXk8mxvncZKUxUEygCVIJ.html.
- “No Girl Should Be Proud When She's Told ‘Tu Beti Nahi, Beta Hai Mera.’” *Youth Ki Awaaz*, 21 Sept. 2018, www.youthkiawaaz.com/2018/09/have-you-ever-said-tu-beta-nahi-beti-hai-meri/.
- Ramnath, Nandini. “‘Lust Stories’ Review: Lots of Talk and Some Show.” *Scroll.in*, scroll.in/reel/882502/lust-stories-review-lots-of-talk-and-some-show.
- Shah, Vikas S. “The Role of Film in Society.” *Thought Economics*, 3 June 2015, thoughteconomics.com/the-role-of-film-in-society/.
- Sharma, Suparna. “Lust Stories Movie Review: Of Love, Desire and Liberation.” *Deccan Chronicle*, 30 June 2018, www.deccanchronicle.com/entertainment/movie-reviews/300618/lust-stories-movie-review-of-love-desire-and-liberation.html.
- “Sylvia-Walby-V2.” *NCCA*, www.ncca.ie/en/resources/sylvia-walby-v2.
- Walby, Sylvia. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Blackwell, 1998.