

Fragmented Realities: The Dual Lives of Women in a Patriarchal Society as Portrayed in Lipstick Under My Burkha

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Abstract :

This research paper explores the dual lives of women in the film 'Lipstick Under My Burkha'. The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of patriarchy and to study the social norms on women's lives and its portrayal through four main characters of the movie respectively Usha (Buaji), Shirin, Rehana, and Leela. Alankrita Shrivastava nuancedly portrays women's lives in the movie. Through this title 'Lipstick Under My Burkha', the director wants to shed light on women's inner individuality and the outer pressure to conform. In the movie, "Lipstick" represents their quest for a dream, while "Burkha" represents a patriarchal society and its oppression of women. Focal points of the research paper: like sexual autonomy, repression, liberation, identity, individuality, double lives, gender equality, solidarity among women, which make this film more powerful.

Keywords : Patriarchy, Lipstick, Burkha, Expectation, Society, Desire, Dream, Sexual freedom, Sexual autonomy, Repression, Liberation, Identity, Individuality, Double lives.

Introduction :

Lipstick Under My Burkha is a movie directed by Alankrita Shrivastava and produced by Prakash Jha production. Starred by Ratna Pathak Shah who played Usha Parmar in the movie, Ahana Kumra as Leela, Plobita Borthakur as Rehana Abidi, and Konkana Sen Sharma as Shirin Aslam. These are the main characters from the movie who struggle for freedom and self-identity, released on 14th October 2016, in Mumbai Film Festival. The country refused a certificate of CBFC (Central Board of Film Certification) stating that "There are contagious (sic) sexual scenes, abusive words, audio pornography and a bit of a sensitive touch about one particular section of society." ¹(Lipstick Under My Burkha) The film received several awards.

This movie is closely related to the principles and themes of third-wave feminism. Characters from this movie celebrate individuality and reject the notion of one-size-fits-all. The setting of this movie is in Bhopal's small village, this must be chosen deliberately to showcase the women's position in conservative society. How women in India are burdened with societal expectation, exploitation and discrimination within household and society.

Lipstick Under My Burkha addresses issues like conservative society, lack of opportunity for women. How women's voices are suppressed in patriarchal society. Film had themes like gender inequality, sexual autonomy, clash between tradition and maternity, patriarchy and oppression. Female desire and sexual liberation, freedom and individuality, intersectionality and double standard in society, dreams and aspiration of female solidarity.

Patriarchal Society :

The movie is set in a patriarchal household and society. Characters from the movie suffer from various forms of oppression. Society dehumanizes females and denies their right to freedom, right to speak and also their right to live according to one's choice. In patriarchal society men become dominant over women and treat women according to men's choices. Same happened with the character Rehana Abidi dominated by her father and Shirin Aslam by her husband. This shows

that the father figure from the household be it father, brother, husband and son always dominate women in the house and no one can talk against them. This patriarchal system is deeply rooted in our culture, society and law too. The head of a family is all in all, no one can oppose him if one tries to do so then he will be punished. Family property and asset right inherently goes to the son of the family, while daughter is considered less able and she has to join another family (her - in-laws family) and leave her natal home. Women's status is considered as the "other" in the family as Simone de Beauvoir said in *The Second Sex*, 'One is not born but rather becomes women', is totally related in context with Indian patriarchal condition. The movie and the text both shed light on women's oppression and their struggle for autonomy and self expression. The movie shows the protagonist's struggle for independence in personal and sexual lives. Women are exploited sexually in day to day life and still remain in their roles be it mother, daughter, sister and so on and the same thing we can see in *The Second Sex*, how deeply Simone de Beauvoir illustrates women's role in society. Beauvoir shows that women lived under conditions which society imposed on them. Male dominate women and also other factors of society affect women, making it a hindrance to achieve freedom and self identity. Women should break the barrier imposed by society, when women follow society's unwritten norms society or male from the society get habituated to see women as 'other'. In patriarchal society male become leaders and try to control women's lives where women consider others and their role is secondary in the family. Women have to manage house chores in typical patriarchal families or society makes them so to women, men are considered as breadwinners and women should have managed household duties and be supportive to male and obey them. Women don't have any rights and they can not make decisions. She just has to follow the head of the family. Women just have to bear and raise children and particularly Indian families prioritize sons. Here also girl children are considered a curse to parents. Women's education is also indigestible to men, they think that if women go outside and earn, she will deny men's decision or become overpower. Women are always judged on their job, appearance, education and so on. When women are not educated they face various challenges in their day to day life like economical, educational. They face violence on a gender basis, and always living under societal norms.

Lipstic under My Burkha:

Anankrita Srivastava is an Indian film maker and her work mostly focuses on feminist themes and women centered stories. Lipstick Under Burkha is black comedy drama & best known for its bold portrayal of female desires and struggles around the secret lives of four women in the small Indian Town Bhopal. Srivastava captures the patriarchal Society's reaction where male, dominate women, and society judges, how society imposes their expectations on women and restricts them from achieving self identity and freedom.

The film shows how women are considered secondary & how brutally Indian society treats, exploits and discriminates against them. Women fight silent battles & their voices remain unspoken, how their sexual & emotional desires are unfulfilled but suppressed by society. Characters from this movie struggle for seeking independence, freedom, love and expression and how they struggle to achieve their dream is all Shrivastava shows in the film.

The title "Lipstic Under My Burkha" is symbolic and captures the attention of the film's themes. "Lipstic" and "Burkha" are the two contrast elements and both are associated with feminine elements. "Lipstick" is considered as bold, sexual, associated with women's desire and personal expression. Where "Burkha" is used as a metaphor to impose on women, represent social norms & expectations of society which women don't have rights to cross. "Burkha" is a traditional garment, representing modest conservatism and social restriction, under which women's desires are suppressed. The title itself beautifully showcases the duality of women's lives, where one leads & represents societal norms and the other remains hidden with unspoken desires, ambition & dreams. We can see in this movie how all the four characters are oppressed by norms but their fight against typical patriarchal society and how they overcome it, this is such an inspirational story to all women there. The film delves into themes like gender inequality, and shows the clash between tradition and modern world. Each of the four characters from movies experiencing different issues to achieve freedom.

Character as follows:-**Rosy:**

In Lipstick Under My Burkha there is a character named Rosy - fictional character in the novel named "Lipstick Wale sapne". Novel secretly read by (Ratna Pathak Shah) as Usha who is a widow in the film. The character of Rosy represents Usha's repressed desire and unfulfilled fantasies. Through the story of Rosy, Usha searches for love, passion and freedom in society. Apparently Usha seems as widow but she is a woman with emotions. Usha's inner world reflected through Rosy's character, and with the help of Rosy, Usha trying to pursue her desire without fear of judgement. This character of Rosy, director trying to shed light on emotional and sexual needs of elder women in traditional society.

Usha:

Ratna Pathak Shah played the role of Usha Parmar, she explored the age, desire & societal constraint in the movie. Usha is referred to as "Buaji" throughout the movie, who is a 55-year-old widow. She owns the building in 'Hawaimanzil', which plays a symbolic role in Usha's journey of liberation & self-discovery. She is a motherly figure of Hawaimanzil that's why everyone called her Buaji. Her appearance looked like pious & traditional women but secretly she had desires & fantasies which is not appropriate in the lenses of society because she is a widow. Society expects that older women and especially women should abandon their sexual and emotional needs. Ushaji is trapped in societal expectation and she breaks the stereotypes of age and romance in movies. Usha had habitual to reading but she reads erotic novels and is attracted to her swimming instructor Jaspal and having dreams about him, Usha used to go to the swimming pool & this became a space for Usha where she feels free to express herself.

Moreover her interaction with Jaspal, symbolises her longing for Usha secretly attracted to Jaspal, but Jaspal isn't aware about that and Usha does not want to show that because she fears the judgment of her conservative surroundings. Usha having sex chats with Jaspal to arouse him. Meanwhile she refers to herself as 'Jawani ki bhoot', and feels guilty about her desires and actions and aware about romance and intimacy. She was at such an age which is not appropriate in the lenses of society. These norms of society tell how widows or women should behave and this is what shows that women are afraid to show their real selves to society in a patriarchal world. Usha

should be asexual, dedicated to her duties because she is older. Society denies her right to explore her individuality, society expects that she sacrifices her personal needs and sticks to tradition, the patriarchal world imposed their rules on women which hinder her pursuit of one's dream and desire & also deny their right of existence, women's existence is related to men. If there is a widow in the family she should be engaged in 'Bhakti', supposed to be the backbone of the family but never ever society gave her the right to make her decision. She should only have passed tradition to one generation to another & beyond that she don't have any role. At the end what happened with Usha is When Jaspal know that he is talking with Usha and not with Rosy. Rosy is just a character in novel, he came to Hawaii Manzil and told Usha's neighbour about how she shamed on her neighbours and stigmatized name of Hawaii Manzil. People of Hawaii Manzil got angry when Usha expelled her from the village and said, Man 1: "Get out! You have to be ashamed of yourself aunt!"² (Lipistic Under My Burkha) "Auntie, you have tarnished the good name of the family! No shame! (while tearing up the books) what is this obscene book, indecent Clothes ! Like obscenity at this age. A-55-year- old widow made a nasty phone call to the young man. Disgusting!" And other women said, "The old woman is shameless. We respect her like a mother, and what does she do?!"³ (Lipistic Under My Burkha)

The third man is saying, "Riding lust at this age is embarrassing, what do you teach our children?" Lastly while tearing up the book, Jaspal says " You will never be Rosy... Have you looked in the mirror? Usha ji was bombarded with one and other questions and became speechless. All the members from society raise questions about her existence. This is showing that society dehumanizes women and treats them unfairly, while women just looking for freedom and liberation and escape from societal expectation.

Rehana Abidi:

Rehana Abidi's character is played by Plabita Borthakur. Rehana is from conservative Muslim family, who go to college and is also a resident of Hawaii-Manzil. Her father is very strict and imposed their decision on her. She has a compulsion to wear burkha and stitching burkha is their family business, which gives them bread and they earn through stitching. But what Rehana thinks is that behind the burkha her identity is lost, She wears burkha against her wish. But when she goes to college she used to wear T-shirts and jeans which is against her religious norms. She secretly

follows Miley Cyrus who is a singer. Rehana also wants to become a singer but she knows that her parents won't allow her. She is in her teenage years and wants to go to a party, chill with friends and so on, but on the other side she can't change her parents patriarchal mindset. She doesn't have permission to dance and hang out with friends, her mother rebuked her for doing so, who strictly followed her father's order. In the next scene when she was involved with another student in a college protest, there she spoke about wearing jeans and doubting restrictions on jeans. She wanted freedom of wearing clothes, she used to wear jeans when outside and when she is at home she wears burkha.

In the protest Rehana said that "There are... endless rules in the lives of girls. Don't sing, don't dance, you'll shame us. Don't walk like that, people will stare. Look down what people will say. Don't breathe, your heavy breast will attract attention. Don't wear lipstick, you'll have an affair! Don't wear jeans you will make a scandal ! I want to ask the authorities, what will truly happen? Why is our freedom so frightening to you? Don't we have the right to live as we want? Why does our freedom scare you so?"⁴(Lipstic Under My Burkha)

She raises all these questions about women's existence. She wants to be free as a man. Here Rehana represents all the women, who want to speak but are afraid that society will expel them. When Rehana's father knows about this protest and knows that Rehana is arrested by police. Her father imprisoned her. Where her mother says to her that "You are a shameless girl !" and her father asked her, "What are you protesting about?" she replied " I use a Burkha, I am not worried about jeans. "I am just being in the wrong place at the wrong time", and her father accuses her of bringing dishonor to the family, according to her father, wearing jeans is against their cultural values. Their Rehana replies "Jeans Pehene se iman thodi na Chala jata hai", ("Wearing jeans doesn't mean you lose your faith!"). This line became the turning point in Rehana's life. Rehana's life in Lipstic under My Burkha shows how women are suppressed by family and their societal expectation. Societal expectations make women's life more challenging and complicated. Society never prioritizes women who they actually are rather judged on the basis of secondary choice like clothing and their way of behaviour. The movie shows how women have to obey and follow the patriarchal norms and values. If women violate the rite imposed by men it was supposed as women are cursed to men. Women's passion and self expression hide in the name of respect for family. Rehana's character superbly shows her struggle when she is trying to embrace modernity, how society and

family judges women, and sometimes women have to sacrifice their education and abandon their private life.

Shirin Aslam:

Shirin's character in the movie is played by Konkona Sen Sharma, she is also the resident of Hawai Manzil, a married woman, mother of three and a dutiful wife. She is presenting to all the women there, whose duty is bearing and rearing children. She secretly works as a housewife to support her family. She is a talented woman but in a loveless and abusive marriage and her husband treats her as sex object who satisfied his sexual desire.

Shirin works as a saleswoman to help her husband who is not aware of Shirin's work. Her husband is Saudi return, but he don't like that women go outside and work Shirin is very smart and intelligent and get rewarded for her work, Shirin's marriage is lack of self-worth and independence and she is trying to get it from her work. She don't want to be burden to her family that's why she is earning, but her husband never appreciate her rather abusing.

Shirin is a victim of domestic violence and marital rape, who is controlled by her husband. Her husband is oppressing Shirin for being a submissive wife and mother. Shirin's husband dominated her and she became the subject of non-consensual sex. Rahim dehumanizes Shirin which is the scene of every patriarchal house. Rahim never supposed her as an equal partner but constantly used her body to fulfill his sexual need. Her feeling, emotion & pleasure doesn't exist for Rahim. Despite that he is involved in extra marital relations. Rahim had also controlled Shirin's reproductive role. Shirin can not take the decision about her body when she gave contraception to Rahim he threw it. He thinks that contraception's are embarrassing things to men, but on the other hand he does not care about Shirin's unwanted pregnancies. She is having abortions and taking birth control pills and also undergoes uterus infection but her husband doesn't care about anything. He only showed his authority and ownership in relation.

When Rahim knows about Shirin's work scolding her for doing a job outside without his consent and abusing Shirin and then Shirin questions him about his extra marital affair Rahim says that, "You are a woman. Don't try to wear pants. You have to refuse job offers and sit quietly at home!"⁵(Lipistic Under My Burkha)

This showcases that women's desire doesn't matter in patriarchal homes. Shirin's character shows how women try to balance personal aspiration with societal expectations. This movie acutely shows how women are less valuable in the family and how they are used for doing house chores, bearing children & satisfying men's desire. Women's ambitions neglected in the name of social expectations, and also showing how men brutally treated women and took all the rights of women's body and control women.

Leela:

Leela's character in the movie is played by Ahana Kumra. Leela works as a beautician in the movie. She is a bold and free spirited woman who wants the escape from societal norms which bind her. Her character explores the themes of female agency, sexuality and the struggle for personal freedom in a patriarchal society. Leela has an affair with a photographer named Arshad, and she wants to explore the world with him but Leela's mother wants Leela's arranged marriage with a stable man who will buy a house for Leela's mother. That's why Leela's mother pressures her to arrange marriage against her will. She is trying to control Leela's behaviour and decisions, Leela's mother prioritizing societal norms over happiness in marriage. She is manipulating Leela emotionally. This thing in the movie showcases how patriarchy takes help from women to enforce societal norms and sometimes women become tools of control in patriarchal societies. A mother is imposing her own experiences on her daughter to live in the circle of society. Leela's mother has control over her marriage, highlighting how one involved in generational and traditional conflict between one wants to adhere with tradition and one wants to aspiration for freedom. Which always makes women's lives more complicated, when women try to live on their own terms then it will judge harshly. When Leela begins to take control of her own life she chooses happiness and freedom. She is caught between desire for Arshad and her obligations to her family. Yet her boyfriend and fiancé says that what she all wants is sex. Then she realises how helpless she is as a woman. When she reclaims, "You know what our problem is? We dream too much." ⁶(Lipistic Under My Burkha)

This portrays how one struggles for freedom, self expression and personal fulfillment but doesn't find the way to reach there due to familial pressure, tradition and patriarchy. Through Leela's character we found that there isn't any concern about your happiness to the patriarchy. Patriarchy denies autonomy and restricts women's financial independence.

Conclusion:

In the final analysis of the paper, "Fragmented Realities :The Dual Lives of Women in a Patriarchal Society as Portrayed in Lipstick Under My Burkha", this movie effectively illuminates the patriarchal society's impact on women's lives. This film gives a nuanced portrayal of the dual existence of female characters and how they caught between their personal desire and expectations from society. This film surrounds four main women characters Usha, Shirin, Leela and Rehana and shows the struggle of women's lives, how society oppresses them and how they detach from self identity, freedom and empowerment while fulfilling societal expectation. Moreover it shows how patriarchy dominates women and limits women's potential. In the last scene of the movie all the characters recognized their potential and wanted a free life like Rosy. Lipstick plays a very important role to reflect their life if it is symbolic. Alankrita Shrivastava beautifully portrayed two elements "Burkha" and "Lipstick" in the movie and she gave a detailed observation of both and how it affected the life of all the 4 characters. Burkha symbolizes Shirin's life as a personal struggle, making her submissive and traditional wife, Rehana's life as she is trapped between cultural & familial expectation and want escape. In Leela's life she struggles with the expectation of marriage from society and wants to escape from societal pressure. In Usha's life, the Burkha war symbolizes how one should live as a widow and have to sacrifice all the fantasies and needs. But on the other side lipstick gave voice to all the characters. In Rehana's life Lipstick represents her rebellion and expects life beyond any limits and expectation to achieve her desire and self-expression. In Leela's life it symbolizes sexual freedom and her dream to explore the world. In Usha's life, lipstick gives voice to her suppressed sexual desire and need for companionship in her age (55), which is taboo in the lenses of society. In Shirin's life it encourages her to explore her ambition and self worth.

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