

**Sexuality and Representation of Women in Mainstream Hindi Films of 1960s and 1970s
in context of 'Aradhana' (1969) and 'Seeta Aur Geeta' (1972)**

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Abstract :

Has the representation of the Indian woman changed over the years in mainstream Hindi films? In the 1950s and 1960s, towards the end of the black and white era, the Indian heroine was a silent, suffering entity who believed she was to be seen and not listened; so deep was her manifestation of valuelessness, what the men in the society wanted their counterpart to be. The 1970s reflected the two sides of the Indian woman - one traditional and the other western but still a part of a man's world fulfilling his needs for romance, sexual gratification and procreation. The films of those decades were so simple. It commenced and ended with whether the hero would marry her or not. They had no link with real life, yet they were so thoroughly entertaining. The 1980s witnessed a change in the manner the Indian woman was portrayed, which was not exhibited in the mainstream. The 1990s and the first two decades of twenty first century swung in another direction yet again. Though, it was still about sex and romance. Only this time the woman was an equal partner and human being who could think about her self-dignity. During the end of 1960s and 1970s, Hindi films featuring women as central protagonists began to show evidence of change. These changes initially imperceptible gradually appear perceptible in the following decades. This Paper has tried to enquire the status of Sexuality and Representation of Women in Mainstream Hindi Films of 1960s and 1970s in context of 'Aradhana' (1969) and 'Seeta Aur Geeta' (1972) by following the documentation and archival method. It has tried to interpret the relationship between women characters, state, society, family, time, events and narratives. Besides, the Paper has also followed the method of content analysis and has tried to identify diverse kinds of problems and crisis faced by the women. The primary sources of data and information lie on the films, articles, newspapers, magazines, books etc. The Paper has selected purposefully certain films as sample of study which represents the decades. Nowhere in the mainstream Hindi films does the sexuality of the woman find space for articulation, debate and discussion, critical analysis other than as an object of the male gaze or the voyeuristic gaze of the camera. Critics argue that 'sex' is a dirty nomenclature in the context of Hindi film and especially with reference to women on-screen. Women's sexuality as subject needs further deep analysis and serious study. It is necessary to find out the roots of the alternative existence of women in mainstream Hindi film except for male pleasure. A section of critics is of opinion that sexual desire is women's autonomous expression of sexuality. Female desire purely as a source of pleasure in oneself that has been excluded, invisible, marginalized and denied in mainstream Hindi film. Sexuality in female characters has not been linked to the woman as an 'object' of the

male gaze. The male characters in the film are constructed in a way so that they treat their female counterparts as objects of their gaze, desire, lust, oppression, humiliation etc. The woman character generally does not have 'voice' of her own, becomes an 'object' catering to the desire of other people mainly male. Popular mainstream Hindi films depict women as a shadow of male desire.

Key Words :

Sexuality, Representation, Women, Mainstream, Hindi, Film, 1960s, 1970s.

Introduction :

Has the representation of the Indian woman changed over the years in mainstream Hindi films? In the 1950s and 1960s, towards the end of the black and white era, the Indian heroine was a silent, suffering entity who believed she was to be seen and not listened; so deep was her manifestation of valuelessness, what the men in the society wanted their counterpart to be. The 1970s, reflected the two sides of the Indian woman - one traditional and the other western but still a part of a man's world fulfilling his needs for romance, sexual gratification and procreation. The films of those decades were so simple. It commenced and ended with whether the hero would marry her or not. They had no link with real life, yet they were so thoroughly entertaining. The 1980s witnessed a change in the manner the Indian woman was portrayed, which was not exhibited in the mainstream. The 1990s and the first decade of twenty first century swung in another direction yet again. Though, it was still about sex and romance. Only this time the woman was an equal partner and human being who could think about her self-dignity. During the end of 1960s and 1970s, Hindi films featuring women as central protagonists began to show evidence of change. These changes initially imperceptible gradually appear perceptible in the following decades.

Aims & Objectives :

This paper has tried to enquire the status of Sexuality and Representation of Women in Mainstream Hindi Films of 1960s and 1970s in context of 'Aradhana' (1969) and 'Seeta Aur Geeta' (1972) by following the documentation and archival method. It has tried to interpret the relationship between women characters, state, society, family, time, events and narratives. Besides, the paper has also followed the method of content analysis and has tried to identify diverse kinds of problems and crisis faced by the women.

Methodology :

This paper follows the Historical Method. It has tried to analyze the representative films of the decade of 1960s and 1970s. It has tried to interpret the link between women characters, state, society, family, times, events and narratives. The sources of information lie on the films, articles, newspapers, magazines, books etc. Besides, the paper has followed Content Analysis. The paper has selected purposefully certain films as sample of study which represents the decades.

Sexuality and Representation of Women in Mainstream Hindi Films :

There were characters symbolizing a favoured theme that dominated Hindi films within the 1950s and therefore the 1960s, women playing the central characters. They might adorn glances of a film with their grace and sweetness, precisely in those classics that is also a treasure of melody. The soft melancholy look within the dark eyes of actresses released an ocean of suppressed emotions among men and unveiled a mirror reflection of what women wanted to be. The heat of her smile and therefore the protective embrace of her companionship conjured up the best portrait of a woman as partner-cum-wife. The uninhibited openness of her laugh, the teasing abandon of her smile, the sensuous toss of the locks of hair round her high cheekbones, her slim hourglass figure, all made her into a sublime sexy human being. The films of 1950s, 1960s and 1970s gave a generation of actresses the right platform from which to cast a spell over the audience's heart. Her look tugged at the heartstrings of the audience. Many exhibited the talent behind their beautiful face. She charmed the audience together with her pensive look. Her heavy dramatic presence bounced off her form of casual naturalism. Sometimes the glances of her vulnerable girlhood, her ability to silently swallow her tears, her sublime portrayals of the pain of her passion - these were the unforgettable memories of independent India's phase of adolescence. The audiences have witnessed an effort to represent the woman's point of view or to centre the narrative on a girl caught between desire and an oppressive tradition. The screen woman's melodramas are male-centred. But at the identical time they raise the question of women's desire, and albeit with adequate patriarchal scaffolding, broached questions connected with the emancipation of girls from the oppression of feudal orthodoxy. The contradictory attitudes to kissing (which was banned) and therefore the erotic display of the feminine body as spectacle (which was widespread) within the popular Hindi film is explained by this very ideology of the general public sphere. The feminine body as spectacle could be a public representation, a putting before the general public of an erotic imagery that does not violate the code that prohibits the representation of the private. Screen romance is germane to the present fantasy, where the struggle, failure, pain, disappointment of day to day real world vanishes. The audiences were happy to look at the young couple's romance within the background of the picturesque fantastic thing about landscapes, valleys, mountains, under the expanses of infinite indigo-blue sky. The commercial mainstream Hindi films of 1960s and 1970s always followed the calculated formulaic strategy i.e. the temporary separation of the hero and heroine because of some complications and at the top their re-union after a series of fires and fisticuffs. Though the films were heavily obsessed on the formula still these are always remembered by the cine goers through their unforgettable, heart wrenching songs and music. But when the question of act of affection arises, there has been an extended and confusing silence about this. Its absence in Hindi films entails an understanding the flowery conventions Hindi film applies to portray sex activity. The song and dance sequences substitute for sex scenes.¹ Madhava Prasad speculating about the 'unwritten prohibition' on sex and intimacy, suggests it asserts patriarchal authority, which reserves scopophilia related to intimate sexual relations for itself. On the opposite hand, the eroticized song-and-dance, the 'cabaret' numbers, which Prasad glosses over rather hastily while trying to find reasons for the prohibition on sex, arguably substitute for the 'real thing'. The main focus is especially on the heroine, the fetishized female sexualized through close attention to her costumes and graceful body movements. Whether the heroines lie on their beds, take bath or change garment, they feign an unawareness of their sexualized bodies and therefore the camera's voyeuristic gaze. If we scan meticulously the song and dance numbers we are going to see that the cinematography and editing stress on

facial expressions in close-up or big close-up shots and eye line matches which convey the expression of being smitten. The mixture of music, lyrics and chic sexual undertones evoke sensuality within the song and dance sequences. The love songs express intense emotions and promise eternal unwavering passion always straining against overt desire.

‘Aradhana’ (1969) :

The story opens against the backdrop of idyllic hilly terrain with Airforce officer Arun Varma (Rajesh Khanna) crooning "Mere sapno ki rani" (The Queen of my dream) atop an open jeep along with his co-worker Madan (Sujit Kumar), while Vandana (Sharmila Tagore), the daughter of a doctor Gopal Tripathi (Pahadi Sanyal) demurely sneaks glances at him from a Toy Train. After a brief romance, they have a secret wedding. Soon afterwards, Arun dies in an air crash leaving behind a heartbroken and pregnant Vandana. His family refuses to accept the unwed mother-to-be since her marriage with Arun is never formalized. Meanwhile, her father also dies, leaving her destitute. Vandana's son is finally born, but she is forced to let a childless couple adopt him. But determined to be a part of his life, she accepts the responsibility of becoming his nanny. The boy is named Suraj. Events take an ugly turn when her employer's brother Shyam (Manmohan) arrives and lusts for Vandana. He tries to harass her physically when no-one is around, but Suraj arrives and stabs him to death in order to save his nanny. Upon the arrival of police, Vandana confesses to the murder while Suraj runs away. Thus, Vandana is sent to jail and Suraj forgets this mishap as he grows up. Several years later, when Vandana is released from jail she is befriended by the Jailer (Madan Puri) who takes her home and introduces her to his daughter Renu (Farida Jalal). Vandana comes face to face with her son Suraj (Rajesh Khanna) and understands that Renu is Suraj's fiancée. Suraj, just like how his father wished, is an Airforce officer. He slowly starts remembering that he has seen Vandana somewhere, although Vandana wants to hide the truth as she feels Suraj may be embarrassed upon realizing his parent's background and history. Vandana makes herself home at the Jailer's house. At one time, Suraj gets injured in an air crash just like his real father Arun, but survives. At that time, Vandana meets Madan, who knows that Suraj is Arun and Vandana's son and he wants to tell Suraj the truth. Again, Vandana denies wanting to let Suraj know that he is her son, fearing the consequences. Later when Vandana is not around, Suraj sees her diary where Arun's photo is found. Realizing that Arun and Vandana are his true parents, he however salutes Vandana's self-sacrificing attitude and accepts her as his own mother.

Shakti Samanta's 'Aradhana' based on an old Hollywood melodrama, 'To Each His Own', proved a tremendous success, with its message of patriotism and a little boost from the rumoured 'controversy' over Sharmila Tagore's appearance in a bath towel.

In maternal melodrama the mother's devotion to her son is profound. 'Aradhana' (Prayer, 1969) exemplify this.

‘Vandana’ – The Protagonist :

Shakti Samanta's 'Aradhana' faithful to the maternal melodrama tradition, is a narrative of excess – a woman's acute suffering, sacrifice and her intense love for her son. The film depicts a woman's youthful passion turning into lifelong trial and tribulation.

The film commences with trenchant arguments in court where the female protagonist, Vandana (Sharmila Tagore), is on trial. As the credits end, the viewers hear the prosecutor's concluding

statements. 'Your honour,' he says, 'in the eyes of the law, there is nothing more grave than the murder of a human being. And when the one who gives birth to human beings, a woman, murders a man, the crime becomes even more heinous. I therefore plead with the court that the defendant not be spared because she is a woman. She should be punished severely so that people learn from this precedent and justice is served.' As Vandana, dressed widow-like in austere white clothes, is incarcerated, the camera tilts up to the barred window, and in a protracted flashback, the story unfolds.

Its portrait of a suffering woman derives from the Indo-Anglian literary tradition developed in the shadow of Orientalist canons and Victorian norms.² Sexual restraint is intrinsic to this representation. While popular films absorbed principles of female chastity, 'Aradhana' was the first to explicitly associate romantic love with sexual desire. Yet harking back to chastity principles, it also shows the ruinous consequences of extramarital sex for women.

'Aradhana' breaks with the taboo on explicit sex scenes in Hindi film, where song and dance sequences function as elaborate substitutes.³ In keeping with the location shooting trend where heroines stretch languorously across the landscape as if innocent of the camera's gaze and their own sexualized bodies, 'Aradhana's opening depicts the 'wonders of falling in love'. Yet it somewhat daringly disrupts the sexual sublimation during the couple's courtship. Caught one day in an unexpected downpour, Vandana and Arun take shelter in a motel. Vandana changes out of her drenched clothes and swathes herself in a blanket.

As the camera cuts between Arun's gaze, fixed on Vandana, and the object of his gaze, the two circle of the fire in the middle of the room, which within the mise-en-scene excessively signifies their passion (and perhaps a mock Hindu wedding). Shot against the silhouette of a couple in the neighbouring room (divided from theirs by an opaque glass door) where the man is serenading his lover, Vandana and Arun, in an unusual moment for Hindi film, grapple with the intensity of their sexual desire. At the end of the famous 'Roop Tera Mastana' (You are irresistible) number Vandana steps forward, unbuttons Arun's shirt, and the camera averts its gaze, cutting to the glowing fire. The next shot is of a sunrise. The sequence is memorable for its elegance, skillfully skirting the Censor Board and Hindi film's own curious prudery on matters of sexual intimacy – incessantly spoken of (or sung about) but never 'shown'.

Yet the entire film exhibits the cunning of the maternal melodrama which operates on two levels – both condemning woman's victimization and punishing her for a reckless moment of sexual passion for which men get off scot-free.⁴ Bereft of a man's protection when her lover dies, Vandana distances herself from her son to avoid the ignominy of unwed motherhood, hands over her rights and recognition as a biological mother, and, worst of all, becomes easy prey to strange men.⁵ Though she wards off an imminent rape, its upshot – the death of her rapist – drives the narrative forward. Through this, and her voluntary incarceration to protect her son, her severance from him is complete. Typical of the genre of melodrama there is "a constant struggle for gratification and equally constant blockages to its attainment. [The] narratives are driven by one crisis after another, crises involving severed family ties, separation and loss... Seduction, betrayal, abandonment, extortion, murder, suicide, revenge, jealousy...are... the familiar terrain of melodrama. The victims are most often females threatened in their sexuality, their property, their very identity."⁶

In Asian melodrama desire is dealt with safely when put in terms of female romantic love.⁷ Thus in 'Aradhana', Vandana's sexual affair frames her as a desiring subject who is punished, but her

sacrifice and atonement as a mother are honoured by the state. Here melodrama, with its 'poetics of hyperbole', emotional intensity, excesses and extremes, illuminates 'priorities of valuation' and articulates what cannot be said – "demands inadmissible in the codes of social, psychological, or political discourse."⁸ Thus in the moment of Indian social history, victim-woman melodrama is the patriarchal national-popular's acknowledgement of sexual difference, women's subjectivity, and compensatory validation for her subjugation.⁹

'Aradhana' spawned a virtual woman-victim subgenre in the early 1970s. The self-punishing Vandana in 'Aradhana' quietly acquiesced to a twelve-year incarceration for defending herself against rape. If melodrama condenses profound public/private conflicts, at once exposing and reaffirming power relations, it is also a vivid emotional register in Hindi films.¹⁰ In 'Aradhana', the centrality of affect shored up by the pro-filmic masculine fantasy acknowledges patriarchal oppression and proffers reverence in the form of a grand award from the state (fusing mother/nation/state) – an awkward and phantasmic compensation. The premarital sex openly suggested in 'Aradhana' has punitive consequences. In 'Aradhana' the nation-state applauds a mother's sacrifice for her son.

'Seeta Aur Geeta' (1972) :

'Seeta Aur Geeta' (Seeta and Geeta) is a Hindi comedy, drama film starring Hema Malini in a dual role, and directed by Ramesh Sippy. The story was written by Salim-Javed and the music director was R. D. Burman.

The story is about identical twins (played by Hema Malini) who are separated at birth and grow up with different temperaments. The twins then swap places. Hema's two partners in the film are played by Dharmendra and Sanjeev Kumar. Manorama plays the evil aunt who changes her tune after her arm is twisted. Furthermore, Hema Malini was noted for the novelty of her role as Geeta where she is rambunctious and sometimes violent.

The Plot :

Seeta and Geeta ([Hema Malini](#) in a dual role) are twin girls who were separated at birth. Geeta, a feisty girl is raised in a poor neighbourhood and is a street performer, while Seeta is raised by her cruel aunt Chachi and meek uncle. Chachi treats Seeta like a servant, despite the fact that the family is living off her late parents' money. Seeta's only consolation is her old grandmother. One day, Seeta decides life is not worth living and runs away to commit suicide. She is saved but is mistaken for her identical twin Geeta and is taken to Geeta's home. Meanwhile, Seeta's aunt and uncle are frantically searching for her and find Geeta. They attempt to force Geeta to go with them but, using some of her clever tricks, she escapes them and the police who have been searching for her. She then meets Ravi ([Sanjeev Kumar](#)) and, though he also mistakes her for Seeta, she goes home with him. Ravi is surprised by this 'Seeta' and the 'Seeta' he had met previously. Geeta realizes the cruelty that Seeta has been living under and vows to teach her aunt a lesson. Meanwhile, the real Seeta is living in Geeta's house. Her surrogate mother has attributed her new docile attitude to shock. Here, Seeta meets Raka ([Dharmendra](#)), Geeta's friend and fellow performer. Raka is also surprised by 'Geeta's' sudden gentle nature and desire to do housework. When he tried to coax her into performing, she is unable to do so. Ravi meanwhile falls in love with Geeta. At home, Geeta begins to set everything on a proper course. She resumes control of the money and restores her grandmother to the head of the household, where she belongs. Raka begins to fall in love with Seeta. Trouble begins brewing when Chachi's

brother Ranjeet comes to visit and sees the real Seeta in a marketplace. He follows her and discovers the truth, which leads to a showdown in the villains' den and then ends in a marriage.

‘Seeta’ and ‘Geeta’ – Two different Personas :

It's a pleasant change to have a heroine-centric film and although the hero keeps trying to sneak a piece of the action, the heroine always gets the last word. The film opens by explaining how the twin sisters get separated at birth and brought up by different families. But there are no mystical songs, lockets or other identifying objects needed because the two just happen to be identical, which means of course that there will be confusion between the two when they grow up.

First of all, the audiences meet Seeta and her family. Her parents are dead and Seeta is living with her Aunt Kaushalya, Uncle Badrinath and their two children. Also living in the house is Kaushalya's brother Ranjeet (Roopesh Kumar) and Seeta's grandmother. Kaushalya and her daughter Sheila treat Seeta as a slave and she is constantly abused and overworked. Seeta is the weak-as-water type of heroine, her pathetic and hopeless character is the whole point of this part of the film. Anyway, the focus at this point is much more on Kaushalya who is the best wicked aunt ever. The mean and spoilt mummy's girl Sheila screams as an iron burns her sari rather than just lifting out a hand to move it away. She really does seem to believe she is the delicate flower her mother calls her and she is wonderfully nasty towards her cousin. Ranjeet is appropriately sleazy and obviously the villain once he turns up in a selection of increasingly bad shirts and terrible scarves.

After Seeta's trials and troubles have been established the viewers are introduced to Geeta. Seeta is introduced in a scene where she is scrubbing the floor and her evil aunt is yelling at her. Geeta is introduced by a song – upbeat, full of life and fun, it's an apt description of Geeta and her outlook despite her humble status. Geeta lives with her mother and works as a street performer with Raka (Dharmendra) and Jhumroo (Master Ravi). She's loud, vivacious and nothing at all like her twin sister. There is much made of the differences between the two - Geeta's fiery nature and her loving relationship with her mother for example, compared to Seeta's meek obedience and her constant craving for her lost parents. It all sets the scene for the inevitable switch between the two sisters.

Since she feels sorry for the grandmother, Geeta ends up back in the mansion living with Seeta's family, but she doesn't appreciate the idea of being their servant and certainly won't put up with any abuse. It's a shock for everyone in the family when their previously docile slave lashes out and forces everyone else to work instead. Geeta is hilarious as she pretends to be Seeta and turns the tables on Kaushalya and Ranjeet. It all works so well because of the excellent performance by Hema Malini as the two different sisters. Geeta is a strong and determined character and Hema conveys this resolution with body language and expression just as much as by the dialogue. Seeta is quieter and more submissive, keeping her eyes downcast and her voice softer, but in her own way is just as determined to get what she wants once she breaks free of her restrictive family.

While Geeta is busy reforming Seeta's family, Seeta is found by Raka who naturally thinks she is Geeta and takes her back to Geeta's foster mother Leela (Radhika Rani). Seeta blossoms with the love of her new 'mother' while Leela is amazed to have a daughter who can cook, sew and

volunteers to visit the temple. Despite her abysmal attempts at street performing, Raka falls in love with Seeta and Seeta falls in love with him. Although to be fair he is probably the first person she has met who is as self-absorbed about his orphan status as she is, and their shared misery does create a bond. Their wedding is set, as is Geeta's to Dr. Ravi but of course the path of true love never runs that smoothly and there is still the confusion between the two sisters to sort out. Although Raka tries to save the day, in the end it's Geeta with a little help from her sister who proves that anything a Bollywood hero can do, a heroine can do even better.

The charming and debonair Dr. Ravi asserts that he wants a good Hindustani girl as his ideal wife but despite his initial statement he doesn't seem to mind when Geeta dresses in more Western style clothes and he positively encourages her to go roller-skating. When it comes to Raka, but since he is rather overshadowed by Geeta and his over acting goes almost totally unnoticed beside the caricature of Kaushalya. Both Pratima Devi as the long-suffering grandmother and Satyendra Kappoo as Kaushalya's hen-pecked husband provide excellent support, as do the various other members of the cast. But it's Hema and Manorama who are the two essential elements to the film.

Javed Akhtar, Satish Bhatnagar and Salim Khan have done a great job adapting the 'Prince and the Pauper' storyline to suit a Bollywood audience and the dialogue is well written and very funny. Director Ramesh Sippy keeps everything moving along and despite knowing the switch is going to happen he still builds plenty of suspense into the story. This is a total Bollywood classic – great performances, good songs and excellent comedy.

The 'Aradhana'-style abject woman victim 'Vandana' was contested by alternative representations, which were popular in the early 1970s, epitomized by Ramesh Sippy's 'Seeta Aur Geeta'¹¹. It is unique in its combination of comedy, stunts and pleasurable revenge fantasies - a response to the public discourse on women's issues.

The twin sisters separated at birth and subsequently by their class location which casts them as opposite poles. Seeta is quiet, introvert, demure and repressed while Geeta is extrovert, loquacious, tough and street-smart. Their class difference is marked in their persona. Geeta's low-class status allows her to move freely outside her home, while Seeta's bourgeois upbringing confines her within an isolated domestic space. The difference between the poor rich girl and the happy poor girl is embellished to combine the features of class and gender. The film upholds Seeta's repressed upper-class persona and Geeta's vaudevillian free moving character become the narrative alibi. Due to her class location, Geeta's exposure to the public world makes her strong to deal with its reality and also to challenge the rules of bourgeois domestic oppression.

When the cruel aunt of Seeta takes out her sari and the visibly humiliated Seeta ran to hide herself in a safe corner of her home Ranjeet, the brother of the aunt blocked her way. Seeing Seeta in undergarment, Ranjeet passed lewd comments – 'Oh, so my sister did manage to take out your clothes? Why have you left the rest, do they belong to you?' In this sequence, Ranjeet's perverted taste to consume the unmarried woman is clearly exhibited. His lust for Seeta is exposed. His perverted look towards Seeta's body is enough to defame the dignity of a woman. Even Seeta is being humiliated by the greedy and cruel aunt who forcibly takes out Seeta's Sari by saying, 'Stop the act of chastity, shameless girl.' So here the woman is being humiliated and sexually attacked not only by the men but also the women.

Geeta punishes Seeta's tormentors for the abuse inflicted on both sisters. Playing off polar masculine archetypes, this film foregrounds an altogether different dimension. These new meanings derive from challenging patriarchal control and burden some domestic work.¹² Seeta's position resonates with the bourgeois housewife's precarious and conditional access to family wealth. Losing tolerance for domestic oppression costs her total dispossession.

Seeta's reality resonates with Indian women's loneliness in their in-laws' homes, a world of domestic work and sometimes physical abuse. Geeta's performance becomes a story of avenging the condition of all women.

There's just something about a girl wielding the whip at an evil guy. In Ramesh Sippy's 'Seeta Aur Geeta', Geeta gets to welt Ranjeet the baddie with a belt, slaps him, hits him with the back of a table tennis racquet and even calls him 'kuttey' (dog). Sippy gives plenty of 'hero' moments to his heroine in his evergreen entertainer. The film exhibits Geeta's entry in the villain's den crashing through the window. Sippy turns the grim fairy tale of Cinderella into a Bollywood potboiler where Daring Princess has to rescue Suffering Princess, who happens to be her long lost twin sister.

The viewers have witnessed the knockout performance of Hema Malini — as the tortured Seeta in a white sari who is made to mop floors and as the bellbottom-clad skating diva Geeta.

This was Sippy's second film after 'Andaz' and he was kicked to do his version of Dilip Kumar's 'Ram Aur Shyam' (Ram and Shyam). Sippy shared the idea with writers Salim-Javed. "I threw the idea at them and they got excited. I wanted to do my version of 'Ram Aur Shyam' and felt it would suit a female lead better since people were more likely to accept a girl in a submissive role," says Sippy. The formula worked for Sippy's film and later for the Sridevi-starrer 'Chaalbaaz', which was inspired by 'Seeta Aur Geeta'.

Salim-Javed wrote striking lines. When Geeta is complimented by Ravi (Sanjeev)'s parents on looking pretty, she quips, "Ji, main maange hue kapdon mein hamesha achchi lagti hoon" (I am always looking good in the borrowed clothes).

It's the Hema-Manorama chemistry that makes the film stand out. Manorama — the character actress of the rolling eyeballs, theatrical hand gestures, knitted brows and shrill-now-and-tender-then voice. If Hema had the star role in this film, then as the evil stepmother (in this case evil aunt Chachi Kaushalya), Manorama was the star performer of the enterprise. Her classic "neeche aa jaa beti" (Come down my daughter) line and its perfect rejoinder by Geeta as "upar aa jaa moti" (Come up fatty), as the latter is sitting atop a fan, rightfully deserves its iconic status as one of the best filmy repartees.¹³

Geeta learns about the teachings from her grandmother that a lie is justifiable if proffered in the service of people and to fight oppression. Geeta's masquerade, the grandmother reiterates, is justifiable because Geeta subverts the power balance and introduces a new just order in the household, the grandmother gains her rightful authority, the unkind aunt is put to work in the kitchen and Ranjeet, who habitually toughed up and even molested Seeta, is single-handedly beaten by Geeta, forced to defer to the elderly domestic servant and put to work in the household's service. Servants and elders get their due respect while the parasites and bullies now serve them.

The suffering 'Vandana' in 'Aradhana' and 'Seeta' in 'Seeta Aur Geeta' stand in contrast to 'Geeta', a powerful woman, the dispossessed 'subaltern' figure, yet the ultimate avenging heroine liberating her hesitant, repressed upper-class sister.

In the film, Seeta's sister is the one to stage the rescue. Even more interesting is the symbolic empowerment the narrative accords to the lower-class woman. The street-savvy Geeta's physical agility and prowess as a performer comes handy in rescuing Seeta, whose upper-class restraint prevents her from helping herself.

The climactic fight scene is enacted toward the end of all Hindi films and depicts the classic showdown between good and evil. Geeta handily defeats Ranjeet's hoodlums, who hold Seeta in captivity. Tellingly, in the final showdown Ranjeet is overcome not by Raka, as would be traditionally expected (two males fighting over the woman), but by Geeta. It is an interesting reversal of the conventional Indian feminist self-aggrandizing historical narrative, wherein the bourgeois woman 'saves' lower-class women from social evils such as illiteracy, coercive reproductive control and abusive marriages.¹⁴ It is easy to appreciate the appeal of such a reversal, even as a symbolic gesture toward what contemporary discourse might term 'political correctness'.

Geeta's stunts defy the laws of gravity and of spatial and temporal determinacy. Even as a successful trapeze artist, Geeta's physical prowess is scarcely credible – fencing, wrestling, jumping down and then back up three flights of stairs in reverse motion all exemplify the 'laughing grammar', the film's celebration of the carnivalesque, while adhering to popular Hindi cinema's traditional narrative structure.

Geeta's gendered female subject position is indeed recuperated at the end of the film. However in her case it is not the errant heroine "not yet a woman, . . . 'a child', that is brought into line by a masterful, dominating privileged, wealthy and propertied" hero's "overpowering virility".¹⁵ If anything, in the final comic gag the two new husbands – bashful lovers – are "had" by the twin sisters, who enjoy confusing them by sending them scurrying between bridal suites to claim their rightful wife. All, of course, much to the delight of an equally confused audiences. Geeta's bigendered position is recuperated and confirmed in her heterosexuality, by demonstrating that she is after all entirely exchangeable with the passive, feminine Seeta, while Seeta is permitted to claim a playful persona, in what viewers are left to speculate might be a new beginning.

Heterosexual romance in film underwent significant attrition, leading to a steady eclipse of women's roles.¹⁶

Conclusion :

The peculiarity is that nowhere in the mainstream Hindi films does the sexuality of the woman find space for articulation, debate and discussion, critical analysis other than as an object of the male gaze or the voyeuristic gaze of the camera. Critics argue that 'sex' is a dirty nomenclature in the context of Hindi film and especially with reference to women on-screen. Women's sexuality as subject needs further deep analysis and serious study. It is necessary to find out the roots of the alternative existence of women in mainstream Hindi film except for male pleasure be it through choice or force. A section of critics is of opinion that sexual desire is women's autonomous expression of sexuality. Female desire purely as a source of pleasure in oneself that

has been excluded, invisible, marginalized and denied in mainstream Hindi film. Sexuality in female characters has not been linked to the woman as an 'object' of the male gaze. The male characters in the film are constructed in a way so that they treat their female counterparts as objects of their gaze, desire, lust, oppression, humiliation etc. The woman character generally does not have 'voice' of her own, becomes an 'object' catering to the desire of other people mainly male. Popular mainstream Hindi films depict women as a shadow of male desire.

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1. Madhava Prasad, M. *Cinema and the Desire for Modernity*. Journal of Arts and Ideas, 25-26 (1994) : 71-86.
2. Tharu, Susie "Tracing Savitri's Pedigree." In *Recasting Women : Essays in Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 255-256, 260, 265 New Delhi : Kali for Women, 1989.
3. Yash Chopra's earlier 'Dhool Ka Phool' (Blossom of Dust,1959) narrates the terrible consequences of premarital sex, which occurs off-screen.
4. Viviani, Christian *Who Is Without Sin : The Maternal Melodrama in American Film, 1930-1939*. in *Imitations of Life*, edited by Landy, 178.
5. Viviani points out that the maternal melodrama, Madam X-style, repeatedly traces the mother's separation from the child. The mother watches the child "from afar; she cannot risk jeopardizing his fortunes by contamination with her own bad repute." Viviani, "Who Is Without Sin," 171.
6. Landy, Marcia "Introduction." in *Imitations of Life*, edited by Landy, 14.
7. Ann Kaplan, citing Chris Berry, calls this an "anti-individual aesthetic" in Chinese melodrama. See her *Problematising Cross-Cultural Analysis : The Case of Women in Recent Chinese Cinema*. Perspectives on Chinese Cinema 145 and "Melodrama/Subjectivity/Ideology : Western melodrama theories and their relevance to recent Chinese cinema." in Dissanayake, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, 25.
8. For priorities of hyperbole and valuation see Wimal Dissanayake "Introduction," in his *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, 2 & 4; and for inadmissible codes, Ann Kaplan citing Christine Glendhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is* 38 London : BFI, 1987, in Dissanayake, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, 10.
9. Viridi, Jyotika *The Cinematic Imagination : Indian Popular Films as Social History*. 151 Ranikhet : Permanent Black, 2003.
10. On melodrama see Glendhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is* London : BFI, 1987 and edited by Landy, *Imitations of Life*.
11. Thomas Schatz, *The Family Melodrama*. in edited by Landy, *Imitations of Life*, 149.
12. Jeffery and Jeffery, "Killing My Heart's Desire : Education and Female Autonomy in Rural North India." In *Women As Subjects : South Asian Histories*, edited by Nita Kumar 125-171 Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia, 1994.

13. Singh, Harneet . *Where A Girl Whipped A Boy*, The India Express, November 18, 2012.
14. Hindi cinema caricatures women organizing especially westernized women acting as saviours of their subaltern sisters.
15. Ebert, Teresa L. *The Romance of Patriarchy : Ideology, Subjectivity and Feminist Cultural Theory*. Cultural Critique, Special Issue : Popular Narratives/Popular Image 10 1988 : 41 and Janet Dailey, *Dangerous Masquerade* 135, London : Mills and Boon, 1976, qtd. in Ebert, 41.
16. Viridi, Jyotika *The Cinematic Imagination : Indian Popular Films as Social History*.159 Ranikhet : Permanent Black, 2003.