



Empowering Silent Voices: Women's Journey towards Happiness

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Abstract: *Gender roles and their stereotyped behaviour is influenced by various factors, both external and internal, during the course of an individual's life. But, the identity of being an ideal woman is allegedly triggered by media and marketing. It seems to create an identity benchmark in the society and a pressure in women to comply with these identity standards. Indian concept of 'woman' varies across region, religion, class and ethnic group. The foremost identity of woman as wife and mother is fairly unified. It is one in which woman is defined in relation to a man and her capacity to reproduce. This led many of the women to believe that acceptable female roles included only those centered on being a "devoted daughter, nurturing wife, and sacrificing mother" (Dasgupta & Warriar 1996, p. 246). Literature, life and cinema lie at a common interface which is marked by a constant flux of emotions and ideals. In the recent times this flux has become a matter of interest as both literature and cinema are easily accessible and are integral to the contemporary Indian psyche. Many writers worldwide have portrayed the dire need for emancipation of woman. Issues pertaining to women like gender disparity, psychological turbulence, schizophrenic psychosis, existential predicament etc have been highlighted by novelists. It is now media who has taken the responsibility of bringing these issues forcefully to its audience. Media definitely caters to a wide variety of audience and as compared to Literature, has a wider response. Aligned to above research based and practiced based view point, the researchers have attempted to carry out an in -depth analysis on the movie 'PROVOKED', where the women stand against her Ideal Indian Self and walks towards the happiness with the help of western social support. This conceptual paper explores the unique contribution to traditional qualitative research methodology and urban educational renewal that documentary film can achieve through illumination of issues of social justice and existing inequities in public education.*



Keywords: Happiness, Self-Identity, Social Support, Women Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's world is full of stark differences. Human lifestyle and economic growth have advanced significantly. Simultaneously, deep-seated social and political inequities continue to limit chances for many of the world's poor and marginalised, particularly women. Women account for roughly half of the world's population. Despite this, they have never gotten the necessary care, and have frequently been ignored. Indian society is multilingual and cosmopolitan, with notable caste, creed, and gender distinctions. In India's tumultuous social structure, women not only find themselves in a variety of circumstances - both advantageous and unfavorable - but also must contend with the many social conventions and traditions that have evolved through time.

In India, the concept of 'woman' differs according to region, religion, class, and ethnic group. The basic identity of a woman is that of a wife and mother. It is one in which a woman is defined by her ability to reproduce in connection to a man. Within India, religions and cultural practices have tolerated patriarchy and the assumption that males are dominant/superior to women. According to traditional Indian cultural narrative, women are expected to care for the home and family while also practising unconditional self-sacrifice and nurturance. Gendered constraints and expectations were not only tolerated but actually expected aspects of being a woman. Their family had highly valued marriage, motherhood, and religion. Because of this, many of the women came to believe that only roles centred on being a "devoted daughter, nurturing wife, and sacrificing mother" were acceptable (Dasgupta & Warriar 1996, p. 246).

Huma Ahmed-Ghosh (2004) explored how patriarchy, in the name of "family values" and "tradition," is replicated in the existing legal act and court system dealing with domestic violence in her study on domestic abuse in India. Male privilege is cited as a factor in the persistence of domestic violence across both men's and women's life cycles. The study identified alternative answers to the problem of domestic abuse by referring to men's organisations in several countries are seeking novel approaches to combating the crisis and where India can culturally create the space for sensitising men to the current crisis. This study looked at how women and men were portrayed in Indian magazine advertisements. Over 1,100 magazine advertising from a variety of periodicals were studied in 1987, 1990, and 1994. The findings show that, while depictions of women and men in Indian magazine advertisements have improved through time, they are still stereotyped. The nature of the product being sold appears to impact role depictions in Indian magazine advertisements. Das (2000) discusses the similarities and contrasts between role depictions in Indian magazine advertisements and those from other countries. Women's positions are required for women's independence from male-dominated society and other types of control. However, in terms of family and community standing, they face adversity and humiliation as an outcome of a culture of patriarchy (Das, 2013). Violence and criminality against women have become a global epidemic. Crime against women is a prevalent scourge in Indian society and is strongly ingrained in Indian culture. The



Indian Penal Code criminalises rape, kidnapping and abduction, homicide for dowry and dowry killings, torture, molestation, sexual harassment, and the importation of females. In India, violence against women is a major issue. Marital abuse or intimate partner violence is by far the most terrible and devastating kind of violence that women endure in the patriarchal environment. It reflects women's fragility inside the limitations of the family, the negative influence of which is difficult to overcome. Though marital violence occurs everywhere, regardless of race, class, religion, or geography, it is more normalised and sanctioned in particular cultures or ethnic groups "as an inherent part of their cultural repertoire" (Menjivar 901). This is true in a nation like India, where patriarchal traditions govern marital life and family interactions and family hierarchies are meticulously preserved. The bride enters the husband's family and becomes a member of it after marriage, making it obligatory for her to adapt herself to the ways of her husband and his family.

Literature, life, and film all share a common ground distinguished by a perpetual flux of emotions and aspirations. This flux has recently piqued the public's curiosity, as both literature and film are widely available and vital to the modern Indian mindset. Many artists throughout the world have depicted the desperate need for women's independence. Novelists have addressed issues concerning women such as gender inequity, psychological instability, schizophrenic insanity, existential problem, and so on. It is now up to the media to forcibly bring these concerns to the attention of its viewers. Media obviously appeals to a diverse audience and has a larger reaction than literature.

Provoked is the genuine consideration of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, a Punjabi woman who migrated to London following her marriage to Deepak Ahluwalia. Her husband appeared to be sympathetic at first, but later started beating her up. He started drinking thoroughly and slept with other women, and he also raped her. Two hours after another incident of marital abuse, Kiran sets Deepak on fire as he is sleeping. He dies from his injuries, and she is condemned to life in jail for premeditated murder. Kiranjit, an Indian homemaker, had an arranged wedding to Deepak Ahluwalia, a British Asian industrial worker, and was exposed to acute violence and forms of mental distress for 10 years. She ultimately set fire to her spouse's sleeping chamber. The film chronicles her life at the time of the assault until her subsequent release. It shows her stay in a women's prison, her attempts to keep in touch with her children while imprisoned, and, finally, her trial and subsequent leave to appeal. Other characters emerge, including a Southall Black Sisters volunteer, a fellow female prisoner who has also slain her partner, and legal and medical professionals involved in the case, while flashbacks illustrate her history with domestic abuse in her marriage.

Provoked is a film that condemns male domestic abuse. We see a portrayal of a male-dominated society, with Kiran in a hazardous predicament and the Deepak's irritated grunt. Deepak, the controlling husband, is both physically attracted to his wife and abuses when she fails to suit his requirements, he blames her. (Scene duration: 67:81 seconds to 69:38 seconds). In Provoked, Kiranjit describes in depth what a 'ideal lady' is expected in her culture. In her campaign address, she outlines the characteristics that an ideal woman must have. She is trained to bear various forms of injustice and misery in silence in order to sustain this false 'honour'



and grandeur. Furthermore, religion tells her that her husband is God and that her religious duty is to please his every whim. A woman who does not pursue this route has no respect or place in our culture. She is completely alone in her suffering from various assaults and pain. She is accountable not just for her husband's happiness, but also for the happiness of his complete family. (Ahluwalia and Gupta 2008, 243) The lecture emphasises how culture, religion, and society all work together on how exert women are psychological in nature, interpersonal, emotional, and physiological grip on them. Any divergence from these pre-established boundaries and frameworks leads to social exclusion. When the ways of fleeing tyranny are investigated, the social structure and family come in to constrain that primitive initiative. 'I have attempted multiple times to escape the trap of my tormented married life,' recalls Kiranjit. But every time, my spouse and family put pressure on me to preserve their izzat' (Ahluwalia and Gupta 2008, 243).

Divorce is viewed as a last alternative, to be used only when all other options have been exhausted. Remarriage is not an appealing option for a woman. It means shame for herself and her family, and she is unlikely to find a well-endowed spouse. (1982, 9) Women like Kiranjit are finding it increasingly difficult to escape their dreadful situations since this 'final resort' is unlikely to provide opportunities for a better future. 'Given an enormous difficulties and limitations that prolonged estrangement from the family frequently involves, it is concisely deserving making every effort to find a way to accomplish an internal negotiation of links' (Ballard 1982, 11). Kiranjit continues to attempt to achieve this renegotiation but is eventually driven to the point of killing her husband. She is depressed because of her experiences with abuse and violence in her life with Deepak, and she sees no way out of her condition. After she refused to pay him money that evening, he was about to burn her face with an iron that's hot and tried to sever her ankles. She was enraged, and once Deepak was sleeping, she combined caustic soda with fuel and lit his feet on fire. In her essay, Bindel cites her as follows: I couldn't see a way out of the violence... I decided to demonstrate how much it hurt to him. I attempted to flee at times, then he could grab me and thrash me even more serious. I organised to scorch his feet so he couldn't pursue me down (2007). It's a psychological distress situation in which she eventually succumbs to self-conservation and, as a result, self-validation.

Mundhra opens the film at the moment where Kiran is brought into custody for burning her husband. Here is a woman who is sent from the comforts of home and family to the most unpleasant of settings, a women's jail; nonetheless, it is here that she begins her path of resilience, confidence building, and survival. This is a trip in which many other individuals reach helping hands to her, whether they are her fellow inmates or volunteer organisations fighting for battered women. What Kiranjit remembers about her terrible marriage is depicted in flashbacks interspersed with her time in jail. She draws strength from the hard reality of jail life, the judicial system, and life in general. Deepa Mehta, the director, constructs a narrative of fantasy and myth in *Heaven on Earth*, which contrasts the dismal world of Indian immigrants in Canada. She consults India's vast library of myths and traditions to devise an escape plan for the young, abused wife.

Kiranjit's example is admirable in that it exemplifies women's capacity to overcome adversity and shape their lives in the best possible direction. In tracing the transformation of Kiranjit



from a timid and passive Punjabi immigrant in the UK who puts up with her husband's abuse to a strong woman who overcomes the trauma and is ready to face the challenges of life, Jag Mundhra weaves an endearing tale of human endurance, fellow feeling, and compassion. Her first step towards liberty is to set fire to her spouse. Her reasoning is that she did it to help him comprehend the suffering she had suffered at his hands and to keep him from going after her to inflict misery on her. When she is detained shortly after the crime, she is in a bewildered condition, "neither lucid nor aware of her surroundings" (Provoked). This, along with her limited English understanding, precludes her from making any self-defense moves during the police inquiry. When her lawyer visits her in prison and tells her that she must speak up in court and recount her story of abuse in order to get sympathy from the court and have the result in her favour, she refuses, claiming that her English is too bad and that she is embarrassed. Furthermore, she feels she has "sinned" and so deserves to be punished. She is sentenced to life in jail since she does not plead self-defence or provocation. She is also in a stupor and culture shock in prison, but things are progressively changing. When Radha, the fiery activist working for Southall Black Sisters, is asked about her well-being in prison, she responds, "I feel free" (Provoked) "I left my husband's imprisonment and accepted the prison of the law," she says at a demonstration organised to raise public support for her. I've finally discovered a sense of freedom here" (Provoked). Veronica Scott, also known as Ronnie, her cellmate, is important in bringing her out and making her more honest and confident. Ronnie, who is doing time in jail for stabbing her husband, becomes her protector, mentor, confidant, and friend. She works hard to strengthen her mastery of the English language by having her read books from the library. More importantly, Ronnie convinces her brother, the famed lawyer Lord Foster, to serve as Queen's Counsel for Kiranjit during the retrial. Given her rocky relationship with her brother and refusal to allow him to intervene in her own legal troubles, Ronnie makes this gesture as a particular favour for her buddy. Kiranjit's perspective and looks alter because of her relationship with Ronnie and the other female convicts. Her friends cut off her long locks of hair and as she gets ready to face the world to tell her story of abuse at a public rally, she dons pants and suit instead of her traditional Punjabi attire. She has clearly changed a lot from the shy Punjabi woman who was reluctant to give up her 'mangalsutra' when she first arrived at the jail. Radha Dalal of SBS is also providing moral assistance. Radha takes the initiative to request that Kiran be retried. Radha is able to get public notice and overwhelming support for Kiranjit's cause with the help of the Southall Black Sisters. We know by the conclusion of the film that Kiranjit has gone a long way from the mute, terrified, and mistreated woman she once was.

The film Provoked follows her path from domestic assault victim to convicted murderer to the woman who transformed public thinking about abused women who execute their abusers. Kiran's legal battle also triggered the shift in legislation. Kiran's victorious appeals of her assassination conviction set a fresh precedent: women who kill because of severe domestic violence should not be considered as cold-blooded killers. Ahluwalia stated, "I had no intention for me to kill him; I just wanted him to refrain from torturing me" (m. guardian.co.uk). In fact, Provoked belongs to India's social movie strain, because it has a message to convey: male abuse of quiet spouses so there are no songs, only Rahman's effective background music when the suffering becomes unbearable, and through them, we hear something of humanity's chant for



mercy. As Kiran is thrown to the ground by her iron guy, it rises. (Scene duration: 67:81 seconds to 69:38 seconds). In the prison, there are also emotional scenes, such as when Kiran unfastens her supportive cellmate's top throughout a conversation and speaks bosoms (Scene time duration=82 mins:77secs to 82mins:78secs), in reference to a reading class where Kiran was struggling over that word (Scene time duration=66mins:74secs to 67mins:48secs). Any contained environment might have done the job, and it's surprising for our freedom individuality that Kiran claims to be more free in prison than she is outside. Deepak was also discovered to be an overly possessive spouse in the flashback sequence as Deepak requests that Kiran first perform with his friend and then pay for it by being handled brutally and severely by her husband. Deepak ultimately confronts Kiran in the kitchen by tormenting her. (Scene time duration=29:36 seconds to 32:20 seconds).

The second part of the film focuses on her personal development as she finds her place. Her makeover concretizes her abstract progress. She becomes increasingly open about her deepest sentiments, opposing the notion that a woman is a doll that can be broken and stuck at will. From beginning to end, the film captivates the audience. It brilliantly conveys the main character's feelings while also depicting society's harsh judgements. Also, the way people from varied backgrounds, particularly women, are underestimated and not always adequately understood. The scenario that stands out (scenario time duration 15mins:20secs to 18mins:02secs) is when Kiran is requested to remove her jewels and garments at the prison, including her Mangalsutra, a holy necklace for married women, and her Kara, a traditional Sikh bracelet. In front of the officer, she is forced to remove her Punjabi outfits for the prison rags. The jailor encouraged a lady, who has never undressed in the presence of her husband on purpose, to "get remove her garments." This, according to Kiran, signified a loss of belief and integrity. According to Kiran, this equated to an absence of belief and integrity. Another fascinating scene is Kiran's first meal in jail (Scene time duration=28mins:00secs to 28mins:51secs), in which she is fed meat, which her faith (Sikhism) forbids her from eating. The incident is remarkable since Kiran never planned to murder her husband. She just intended to set fire to his feet so he wouldn't follow her, but when he awakened, she yelled and poured it all over him, quickly lighting him on fire. This is a frightening video that depicts the crimes committed on women by callous and ruthless males with patriarchal ideologies. The film delivers a strong message. It begs audiences not to simply turn a blind eye to the horrors pledged on women who suffer in solitude.

2. CONCLUSION

Domestic assault against women has consistently been an issue of concern. Women were frequently viewed as weak, defenseless, and easily capitalized on. To investigate the problem of domestic abuse against women, a life cycle approach is appropriate. Domestic assault against women is on increasing levels in several nations because of a number of economic and social factors. Domestic violence varies in kind and magnitude based on the sociocultural context and value system. Individual research projects and surveys often provide larger estimates of violence than government data. They are, however, thought to overestimate the real prevalence of domestic abuse against women. Women may fail to disclose violence in the family for a



variety of reasons. Domestic violence is frequently characterised as emotional abuse; nevertheless, the form and extent of the assault vary according to socio-cultural factors. Domestic violence is primarily motivated by economic motives; however, other societal variables impact the kind and frequency of domestic violence.

Policy Recommendations:

A multi-sectoral approach that addresses several levels concurrently is required to bridge the gap between law and execution. Improving the institutional and legal framework for women's and girls' security is critical to effectively combating and avoiding gender-based violence.

- Aside from minimizing violence against women, long-term poverty alleviation is only achievable if regular reforms are implemented to provide women possesses the opportunity for learning, medical services, and financial opportunities. This is also a requirement for equitable participation in social and economic decision-making.
- There is a need to improve the abilities of those working in various organisations. Strengthening the ability of government and non-government organisations dealing with domestic abuse against women is an urgent necessity. Professionals who work with women who have been victimized by violence must undergo training and professional development.
- Gender sensitization components should be included in public awareness projects that are properly crafted and logically geared around economic and political efforts. To do this, networks between organizations, activists, and government officials must be strengthened.
- A comprehensive promotion of awareness including the community, religious leaders, women's groups, civil societies, NGOs, and other leaders of opinion is necessary to prevent the current outbreak of domestic abuse against women.
- Laws, legal provisions, rights, and entitlements for women must be made known to them, and equal social rights for women must be campaigned for at the family and community levels. The state must aggressively intervene to preserve women's social, political, economic, and cultural rights, as well as repeal restrictive legislative and administrative regulations that impair their rights in practice.
- Administrative action is required for mass marriage registration in addition to such legal proceedings, camps may be organized with the assistance of VOs and NGOs in the most remote parts of the state.
- Regional-level workers may be involved in identifying both genuine victims and perpetrators. In this method, with the assistance of government agencies, VOs, and NGOs, the problem may be counselled while attempting to offer some job opportunities or training in skills with the goal of breaking the downward spiral of violence.

Notes:

1. 1. Provoked is a 2007 British film based on Ring of Hope a motion picture inspired by Kiranjit Ahluwalia's autobiography. Because of the film's success, The material's post-production variants will be entitled Provoked. Furthermore, Kiranjit Ahluwalia's case, acknowledged in British law textbooks as R v Ahluwalia, modified the definition of the term 'provocation' in abuse of women's instances, redefining her crime as homicide instead



of murder. In order to bring attention to this shift in terminology in the legal system, this study uses the Incited terminology for textual discussion. Yet there is no mention of the feature film of the same title.

2. At the age of 23, Kiranjit Ahluwalia married Deepak Ahluwalia in 1979. After 10 years of a violent relationship in which she had endured physical cruelty, lack of food, jail, and marital rape, she ignited her husband alive. He had serious burns covering 40% of his body and died 10 days later due to complications and infection. Kiranjit Ahluwalia was arrested and charged with murder because of his death. On December 7, 1989, she was condemned to life in prison at Lewes Crown Court. Her attorney neglected to underline in court the serious assaults she had undergone and her mentally disturbed condition at the time. The Southall Black Sisters' intervention on her behalf led in an appeal on the case, as they continued to fight for a mistrial. Due to insufficient counsel, her conviction was overturned in 1992, and she was charged with homicide instead.
3. Jat is a Sikh the privileged caste.

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