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Kinesthesia and catharsis: An analysis of 'Bhumika'

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Kinesthesia is a transformation of mental state into physical catharsis, the embodiment of psychological pain into physical. The layers of mental disturbance are enfolded into physical actions performed through the parts of body. To Eisenstein, physical actions are always motivated by the psychological. Kinesthesia in the form of dance is the transformation of emotions into one's self. The film 'Bhumika-The Role' is based on Hansa Wadkar's autobiography 'Sangtye Aika' (translated into English as 'You Ask, I Tell'). Kinesthesia of her body movements during dance and her act on stage, expresses her inside pain. Her beautiful act is presented to be an act of catharsis. 'Bhumika' is a beautiful transformation of physical embodiment of psychological state of mind. To understand the female version of catharsis, 'Bhumika' is analyzed on the basis of various elements the film is focused upon. The semiotic technique of film analysis is followed to understand the signs and symbols used in the film as metaphors. Along with the symbolic elements (title, storyline, narrative, songs and music, characters and dialogues), technical elements (camera techniques, editing, lighting, location and set) are also analyzed and discussed in the study. The film is based on a female artist and is feminist in nature so, the feminist film theory is applied on it.

Key words: Biographical film, feminism, kinesthesia, catharsis.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema on life reproduces identifiable parts of our world by framing, focusing and juxtaposing aspects of the visible in acceptable ways (Heath, 1981).

Understanding biographical films is equivalent to understanding lives. All the persons these films are based upon have gone through various phases of life, ups and downs and struggles. Their lives could be best understood from their shared experiences, their arts and creativity, their works and achievements and the pain they suffered. In turn, biographical film can be understood by understanding all these terms in relation with the life of hero, these films are based upon. In Shyam Benegal's words, he was the early feminist in Indian context. Along

with autobiography of Hansa Wadekar, her story is also depicting development of film industry through two and half decades 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the era when images changed from black in white to color as well. Certain kind of film stock was used in that era. So the different kind of stock was used in the film to relate to different reality (William, 2006).

The title 'Bhumika' means to play role, to act, to be a character in a film. The title introduce Hansa's role in films and life. The way she finds out characters she is playing from her life itself. The continuity and narrative of biopics is not similar to films of other genre and it cannot be distorted because one incident leads to the other,

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similar to the life it is based upon.

Bhumika, although not a courtesan film in the strict sense as the lead character is not associated with a brothel and her sexuality is not potentially for sale, but the film raises many of the same issues—about art, entertainment, and female sexuality as economy as other films where protagonist is a prostitute. The films make an interesting link between acting and prostitution as many prostitutes were unwilling to appear in movies in 1930s, the time-frame of this film. A self-reflexive film, Bhumika pays obvious homage to Bombay Cinema, recreating the studio atmosphere of 1930s and 1940s (Chakravarty, 1993). The choreographic sensitivity of the film and kinetic art leads to the personal catharsis (Durgnat, 1967).

More than being a women-centered film, Bhumika links to a postcolonial political reality, through the background use of radio news bulletin with the drama of struggle and conflict involving the central character. Realism is presented through Usha's life and fantasy through her movie roles. The screen name of Hansa Wadekar to 'Urvashi alias Usha' connects beauty as well as the mythological role of temptress as Urvashi being the Siren sent by Indira and the gods to distract the sage Vishwamitra for his meditations in the Mahabharata (Chakravarty, 1993).

Sex and power relations and also sex as power relation dominate Benegal's work. The disruptive effect of sex or sex repression is not neglected in situation of change or power relations (Jha, 1985).

METHODOLOGY

Visual, narrative and symbolic representation of the film 'Bhumika' is made to understand the developing image of female power. The visuals representing Usha in life and films are presented and interpreted in relation with the film context. The kinesthesia of dance, art and expressions could be represented through visuals. The way 'Bhumika' relates to the complete female image, development of protagonist with respect to her film career and complex family relations leads to an ultimate goal as an individual. Not only text is examined but text in relation to world it produces through imagination. Feminine spectatorship, female enunciation and feminist textual practice are being analyzed.

Feminine representation in Indian cinema

Laura Mulvey in her 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" that socially established interpretation of sexual differences controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle. The cinema makes an appeal of that of narcissism/ego-libido, in which a sense of self is reconfirmed in the unity of screen image. The female as images, is aligned with spectacle, space and screen (Stam et al., 2002). Bhumika is not associated with Masquerade or fundamental masculinity but Masochism, the sexual perversion in which subject derives pleasure from having pain inflicted (Stam et al., 2002).

Indian biopics are also part of other genres as Hollywood biopics. In Indian cinema, there is much overlap with those that have quasi historical or historical nature (Dwyer, 2014). The Hindi film uses

grandiloquent speech, delivered in memorable dialogues. These dialogues feature famous quotations and imaginary private scenes which take us into the lives of the characters (Dwyer, 2014).

The feminist film theorists were one of refining the models of Marxist emancipation. For the models beginning and ending with men, feminist film theory set itself the task to affirm the distinctiveness and particularity of women's identities in the face of universal narrative of men. Replacing Marxist theories of 1970, women's identity models set in 1980s and 1990 (Durgnat, 1967). Mohini Bhashmasur is noted for having the first woman to act in Indian cinema (Dwyer, 2006).

The first feminist feature film in India was Amar Jyoti (V. Shantaram, 1936), starring Durga Khote and Shanta Apte in the lead roles (Anil, 2012). Inspired from different cultural catalysts, different cinemas consist of different kinds of women protagonists in films. First color film 'Kisan Kanya' and second color film 'Mother India' were with female protagonists. Seeta (Debki Bose, 1934) got first international award to Indian cinema from Venice in 1935 (Jha, 1985). The regional cinemas of India also have many women centered films. Tamil films, Adhyapika (A Lady Teacher, P. Subramaniam, 1968), Oru Penninte Katha (The Story of a Woman, KS Sethumadhavan, 1971), Avalum Penn Thaane (She Also is a Woman, Durai Karuthamma, 1975), Kanchana Sita (Golden Sita, G. Aravindhan, 1977), based on a play by the contemporary Malayalam playwright C. N. Sreekanatan Nair, Ormakayi (In Memoriam, BG Bharathan, 1982), Aparna (CP Padmakumar, 1981), Kattathe Kilikkoodu (A Bird's Nest in Wind, BG Bharathan, 1982), Lekhayude Maranam-Oru Flashback (The Death of Lekha-a Flashback, Kulakkatil Geevarghese George, 1983), Yaro Oral (Someone Unknown, V. K. Pavithran, 1978), Oppol (The Elder Sister, K. S. Sethumadhavan, 1980), Oru Veedu, Oru Ulagam (Our House, Our World, Durai Karuthamma, 1978), Marathi films Sangte Aika (Anant Mane, 1959), Umbartha/Subah (Jabbar Patel, 1982), Gujrati film Bhavni Bhavai (Ketan Mehta, 1980), Kannada films Bili Hendthi (An American Daughter-in-law, P. Kanagal 1975) and Nandi (The beginning, N. Lakshminarayan, 1964) are representative of the powerful roles of women. Sheila-Pind di Kudi (Sheila-A Village girl, K.D. Mehra, 1935), Chan Pardesi (Distant beloved, Chitraath, 1981) and Main Maa Punjab Di (Me, mother of Punjab, Balwant Dullat, 1998) are women protagonist films in Punjabi Cinema. In Manipuri Cinema, Ishanou (The Chosen Woman, Aribam Shyam Sharma, 1990), Sanabi (The Gray Horse, Aribam Shyam Sharma, 1995) are films with women as central figure. Megha Dhaka Taara (Cloud Crapped Star, Ritwik Ghatak, 1960), Devi (The Goddess, Satyajit Ray, 1960) and Charulata (The lonely wife, Satyajit Ray, 1964), are films with women protagonists in Bengali Cinema. Balayogini (K. Subramanyam, 1936) is on Brahmin widows and Telugu films Sumangali (B. N. Reddi, 1940) on the issue of child widows.

Sujata (Bimal Roy, 1959), Ankur (The Seeding, Shyam Benegal, 1974), Mandi (Shyam Benegal, 1983), Bazaar (Sagar Sarhadi, 1984), Mirch Masala (Ketan Mehta, 1989), Sati (The Burning of a Widow, Aparna Sen, 1989), Utsav (Girish Karnad, 1984), Atmaja (Born Inside, Nabyendu Chatterjee, 1990), Maya Memsaab (Ketan Mehta, 1992), Mukta (A Liberated Woman, Jabbar Patel, 1994), Bandit Queen (Shekhar Kapoor, 1994), Dahan (Crossfire of Thereafter, Rituparno Ghosh 1997) Sanshodhan (Govind Nihlani, 1996), Fire (Deepa Mehta, 1996), Hazar Chaurasi ki Maa (The Mother of No. 1084, Govind Nihlani, 1998), Earth (Deepa Mehta, 1998), Water (Deepa Mehta, 2005), Queen (Vikas Bahl, 2014), and Begum Jaan (Srijit Mukherji, 2017) are films in Hindi cinema with women protagonist.

Analysis of Bhumika: The role

Reproduction of an image is the artist's original role. The image of Hansa Wadekar is reproduced in this film. The story telling cinema tells the story from one perspective, from personal experiences,

enfolding the personal history of one's life. The film based on the life of an artist, translates the art work into filmic terms. Placing oneself between the artist and his/her life, the actor's intentions beyond expectations are understood.

A category of art film translates the art work into filmic terms. The internal pain of catharsis is transformed into the choreographic movements of art. Here, the art of act and dance is translated into film form. The physical geneses intensify the audience's empathy with actual movements (Durgnat, 1967).

Here, the character is identified, justified and signified through her pain. Cinema, being an aesthetic state of matter, tells the story in artistic and aesthetic form (Williams, 1980). Cinema is an art of space (Williams, 1980). This art is created in this film in a best way.

The film 'Bhumika' is based on the autobiography of 1930s Marathi stage and film actress Hansa Wadkar, 'Sangte Aika'. It is adapted for screen by Pt. Satyadev Dubey. Govind Nihlani is the cinematographer and Shyam Benegal is the director of the film. This is a film with woman as central theme. The protagonist character of Hansa Wadkar is given the film name 'Usha', played by Samita Patil. Benegal had the rights to adapt her character in his film but more than her reel life, he was more influenced and motivated from internal feminist figure/woman of Hansa than her film career (Sathe, 1985). In an interview with Van Der Heide, Benegal has identified his interest in Hansa Wadkar's autobiography as she was trying to create a "space" for herself in the totally male dominated area (Singh, 2007).

For Iqbal Masud, Bhumika is a story of a girl who wants a conventional life but chances and circumstances lead her to run through a succession of lovers. A game of domination and one-upmanship ensues but ends with the girl being made aware of her own individuality.²⁰

The film tells past in past. The protagonist of film belongs to a family of Devdasi tradition. The film starts from the sound of Ghungru, while Hansa is dancing on stage, this first shot of film establish her as a Marathi stage dancer. 'Mera Zaskila Balam naa aya' is the song, the film starts from. It takes three days of real life, with flashbacks from Usha's childhood and film journey before and after marriage.

The dialogues of the film are spoken by the protagonist or with the protagonist. She is never absent in any shot of the film. This leaves a very powerful and unforgettable image of her on audience's minds. This makes this film unique and impactful.

The scene of Keshav taking Usha to studio, the scene of a woman placing into fire is going on. There are dialogues like "Mere Agni Mahal se aaj tak koi bhi kwari zinda nhi bchi hai, me tumhare sondarya ko jala kar raakh kar dunga. Ab bhi karogi meri bhavnao ka apmaan"? Not any girl could escape from my Agni Mahal. I would turn your beauty into ashes. Would you still hurt my feelings? The film in which this dialogue has been shown, is of ancient times and this dialogue shows the male dominance in ancient India.

Getting contract of new film, she said to her co-star about her husband, "Inhe mubarakbad do, apna business chahe thap karde, mera prize to badhate hi rehte hai (Congratulate him. Even he shuts his business down, keep increasing my price)".

She says to Rajan when he forces her to go back home, "Kehne me bda aajib lagta hai, magar me sahi mayane me gharwali banna chahti hu (it is awkward to say but I wish to be a wife in real terms)." The basic dichotomy, in short, between the wife and the courtesan rests in the opposition between the keeper of the pure lineage and the keeper of the culture; and this divide describe the bookends of diametrically opposed realms of power open to Indian female (Srinivasan, 2006).

In hotel room, when Kale's friend asked him to play song of Pankaj Malik, she denies to play it. Kale said, "Yha gaane ki barikiyon pe behas nahi ho rhi hai, mera dost jo sunna chahta hai, me use sunaunga. Mehmaan ko koi haq nahi wo apni pasand hum par laade, chahe wo kitni bhi badi actress kyu na ho (Here, songs are not being discussed thoroughly. Whatever my friend wants to

hear, I will play. Guests have no right to impose their choice even a popular actress)." Usha says, "Agar me actress nahi hoti to shayad aap aise pesh nahi aate. Actresses ko neecha dikhane me kuch logo ko khas mza aata hai (If I would not be an actor, you would not treat me in this way. Some people enjoy making the actresses feel low)". In this way, her catharsis always comes out in the form of frustration.

She swears two times in the film. Once her mother scolds and beats her to not to meet Kaishav and another time, Keshav asks her to not to indulge with her co-star Rajan. When he leaves, she says, "Me kasam khati hu me jo chahugi wahi karugi (I swear I will do whatever I wish to do)." Both the times, there is insecurity. First time, her mother was insecure of seeing her daughter with her ex-lover and second time, her husband was insecure of losing her, a money making wife. Her husband was not possessive in love as he never mind her work with Rajan, knowing their affection to each-other as he knew their films make money.

Songs and music

The musical structure of particular piece of music has three basic sections:

- (1) Alap: the exposition of music which is without rhythm;
- (2) Rhythm is introduced;
- (3) Tempo increases.

"In the first part, Gharana is almost eliminated. So, there is a very short alap. In the middle section, everything is rendered, with the tempo never going beyond a certain level. This kind of rhythm gives a great deal of warmth to the music. Worked out by Ustad Alladiya Khan, this structure is known as Jaipur Gharana. Such a style of singing is heard on radio in certain sections of the film.

There is not any song directly in the screenplay of movie except 'Mondar baajo baajo re' (Raag Shudha Kalyan), sung by Kirana Gharana Singer. This song expresses her personal catharsis, since it has been sung by her grandmother. She sings this song since childhood. During her practice, during her auditions or whenever she feel depressed. All other songs are in form of film shooting.

'Maskila balam na aaya', recurs a couple of times in film, is shot in very bright and over-saturated colors, using the Moopal Technicolor (William, 2006).

Posters of Usha's films

The posters and titles of the films, Usha played role in are very similar to the different situations she faced in her life. In other word, the life she lived is very similar to her films. These express the catharsis of her life in her films (Figure 1).

The films she plays role in, complete her emptiness and satisfy her loneliness. In the film on the story of Satyavan, who prays and takes life of her husband back from Yumdoot (One who takes the dead person to Yamaraj: The God of death). She plays the role of Champabai, who is stubborn not to sale her body. Her dialogue in Agni Pariksha, "Agar Sita ki agni pariksha nahi le skte to mujhe meera ke zahar ka pyala diya jaye. Tabhi ek pativrata ke sath sachha insaaf hoga" (If you cannot take my ordeal as Sita then give me a cup of poison as Mira, only then a justice would be for a virtuous wife.) All these characters establish her as a powerful woman. Who stands and fights for her rights which she could not do in reality.

Facing mirror: Facing reality of life

Mirror images of Usha represent her double life, her dissatisfaction



Figure 1. Posters of Usha's films.



Figure 2. Facing mirror: Facing reality of life.

from all the roles in life. Everytime she seems looking at her another face in mirror, the face of a completely independent woman and remains unsatisfied by not finding it (Figure 2).

Stairs: Ups and downs/imbalance in life

Complex shots of stairs describe the complexity of situations,

irresolvable problems, dissatisfaction from life and mental disturbance of the characters. Stairs present Usha's journey to a new place. The escape from Kale, hotel room, Rajan's house, hospital, the hotel she spent night with Sunil and Kale's house. The mise-en-scene is such that she feels shrinking in the house. The deep well of stairs has been formed with the hospital stairs in image no. 7, as if she is sinking down in the deep well of grief after abortion (Figure 3).

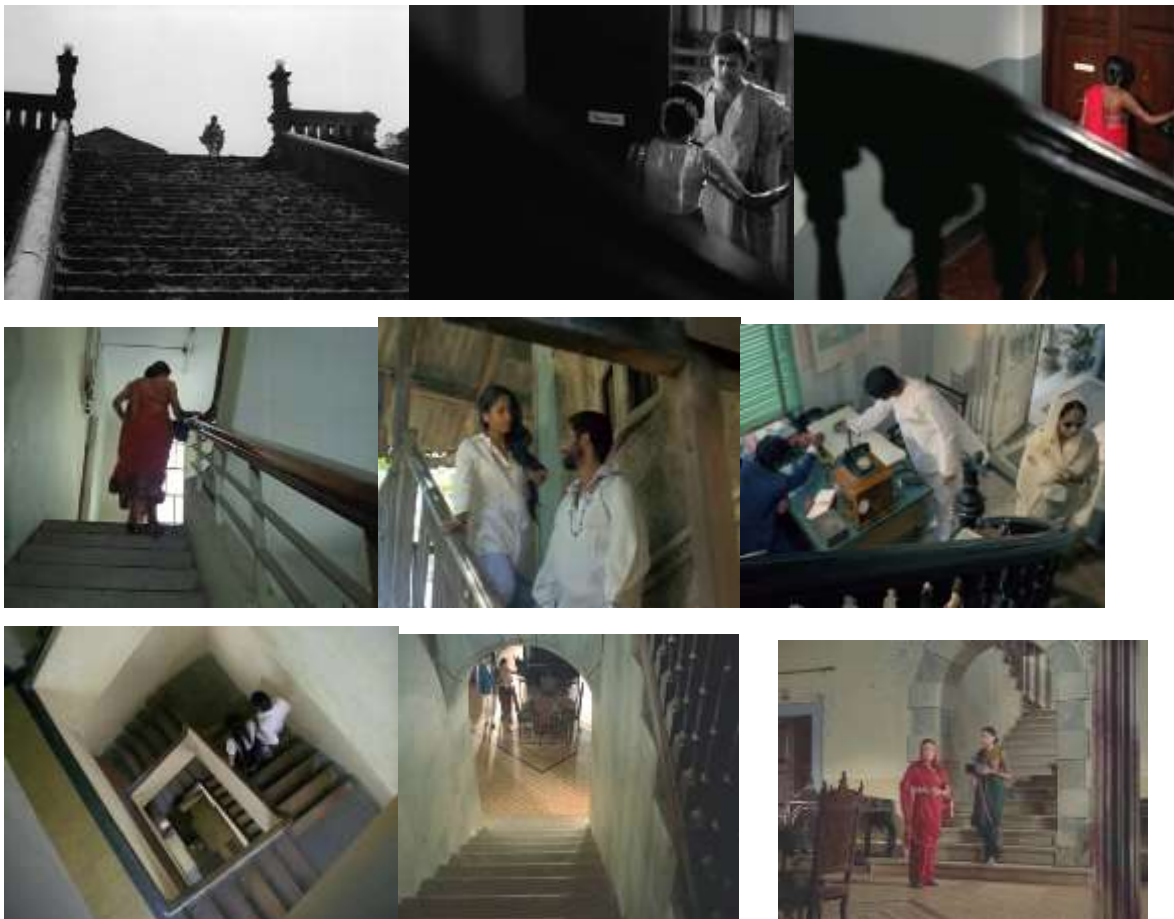


Figure 3. Stairs: Ups and downs/imbalance in life.

Doors: The other world/two different stories in one space

Mise-en-scene of multiple doors in one frame, distinguish the framing of one character from other. It establishes two worlds, related with same story in one space. As if one person is not able to be in the other frame of reference, the other world (Figure 4).

DISCUSSION

The film is a self-reflection of Hansa Wadekar's life, more than her career as a film actress. Govind Nihlani's cinematography of the childhood shots of Usha's life gives an impression of his cinematography in *Pathar Panchali* (Satyajit Ray). Camera identifying secret locations and chasing child interiors of the spaces connects both the films. Usha's internal pain resembles to the protagonist of *Megha Dhaka Taara* (Ritwik Ghatak) either both undergoes different forms of responsibilities, they are equally helpless of freedom and self-reluctance. All the men she lived with, Keshav Dalvi (her husband), used her talent for his surviving throughout life. On the other hand, frustrated from his unsuccessful business, he was jealous with her success. Rajan, her co-star, did not

take her responsibility when she asked for and later, she denies his proposal to marriage as for her.

Sunil (director), a philosopher lover, who speaks about ending life with suicide, betrays her from death as others betray her from life and freedom. Whenever she runs from home, her daughter and mother stay with Keshav instead of going with her as the social respect and security is always at man's side.

She gets unwanted abortion at the blame by her husband that the child does not belong to him. The abortion, the death of a child breaks her down and the pain gives her strength and inspiration to leave the home. She was not informed of her Aaji's (grandmother) death as she was on shoot. When she asks Rajan to take her at his home forever, he says that she is there to take revenge from Keshav only. Wandering all around, escaping from different places. She decides to stay at hotel even if she feels lonely; she is unable to face the situations.

Vinayak Kale (a rich businessman), who she gives her Saris and ornaments, her mother got for her. He gives her responsibility of his paralyzed and dependent wife. There she enjoys the life of a responsible home maker.

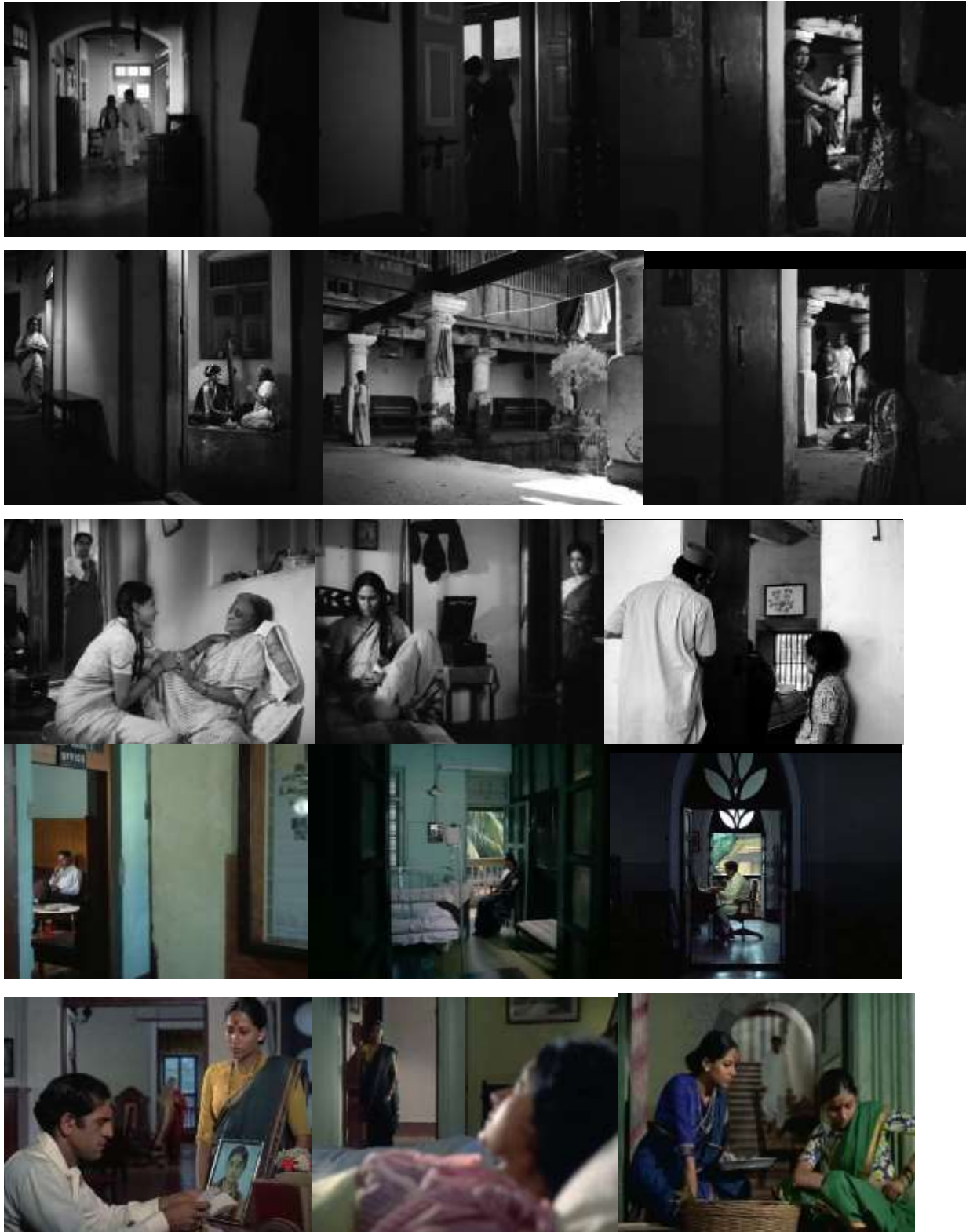


Figure 4. Doors: The other world/two different stories in one space.

The house of Kale, this new space is entirely different from all the spaces. The conflict starts when Kale's son

asks her to go to mela (a fair) with him. But the driver does not obey her order. She comes to know that women

were never allowed to step out of the home there. She decides to leave home. Here, her perspective is shown that she does not fight to be a complete home maker but freedom. It is cleared that she wants to be an independent home maker. She wants to act but not for the purpose of money making, not at the sake of her womanhood. She wants to stay in home, but not at the sake of her freedom.

She writes a letter to her husband to take her back. Kale's wife says, "*Meri maan, apni qaid se samjhota karle. Chli bhi gyi to kya badlega? Sirf bistar badalege, rasoi ghar badlege. Mardo ke makhote badalte hai, mard nhi* (Believe me and take agreement with your prison. What will happen if you will go? Men never change, only their faces change). Kale's wife, the signifier of Parampra (tradition), is physically paralyzed. Her words signify that all these traditions are responsible for her condition which made her mentally and then physically paralyzed.

She comes to know about her mother's death from Keshav. At the death of her grandmother, she was not informed because of work, now she could not be informed due to her escape. Coming back, she knows that her daughter got married. She says, "*Hum dono chahte hai ke tum hamare sath raho* (We two wish you to live with us)." On this, Usha says, "*Tu mujhe kabhi kabhi dekh jaya karna. Mere akelepan se mujhe khud hi nipatna hoga* (Visit me sometimes. I would have to myself deal with my loneliness)." In the concluding shot, she got Rajan's call. She hangs the phone down. She neither replies nor disconnects.

The film is a visual account of the unsuccessfulness of all the homes or places she lived in-childhood home, home after marriage, Joshi's home and hotel room. She always remains as a refugee. Exploited in every role, as a daughter, wife and mother, she used her pain, suffering, frustration and dissatisfaction as a catharsis in her roles in films.

She plays some character when shoot is going on. But the loneliness occurs right after camera is off. It seems as if the aim of her life is lost. Her fans, co-stars, director and producers praise her for good act. She is very strong in her film roles but helpless in real life. As her pain, frustration and dissatisfaction is used by her as a catharsis which results her strong roles and successful films.

It is the story of a woman who has established her identity as an actor but is continuously fighting for her identity as a woman, as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother. Her insecurities make her frustrated and she is unsatisfied, staying with multiple partners and continuously changing places to live. Running away from situations and family responsibilities, living at different places, she is finding peace and satisfaction.

This three days act express her entire life: from the time she is bounded with family frustrations and helplessness to the time she gets freedom of all the responsibilities. Overloaded with responsibilities, she is premature. Any woman could fight with the society for her

identity as an actor. But she fights for the social identity of an actress, being a woman.

The film shows the other phase of feminism. This is not a story of a woman willing to cross the boundaries of a house, but a woman who wishes to celebrate her womanhood more than her profession. Her character tries to find a complete world for an independent woman.

The resonance between her refusal to stay with her husband or daughter and her denial to work in films symbolizes that her life put impact on her films and vice-versa. To leave one, she had to leave the other too. Bhumika is a story of creating space for an entirely male dominated society which she understands could be created in loneliness, without any male companion to live with.

The feminine understanding of the film narrative, both technically as well as symbolically, establish Usha as an individual, decision making and independent woman, who is not a sufferer of her pain but gathers power to rearrange herself and to live in her own personal space.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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