

## Portrayal of Women Protagonist in select Indian Marathi Cinema

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**Abstract:** Indian film Industry also known as Bollywood produces cinema in around twenty Indian regional languages including Hindi. Indian film Industry is the major source of revenue. Indian government gets forty-five per cent revenue from Hindi movies where as fifty five per cent from regional cinemas. Marathi film Industry is the most influential industry in Maharashtra state. The Marathi film Industry emerged with Dadasaheb Phalke's silent film Raja Harishchandra. Marathi regional cinema has enriched with various shades of women. Marathi cinema appears with a new dimension of brilliant and strong revolutionary images of Indian women. Marathi women oriented cinemas brought new concepts of womanhood and sisterhood to enjoy bond love and belongingness among women. Marathi film industry is very powerful source to reach Marathi as well as non- Marathi audience with its simplicity. Marathi cinema depicts the regional diverse local colours of religion, tradition, culture, beliefs, rituals, attire, food, custom, lifestyle, various Marathi dialects like Konkani, Vidarbha, Khandeshi, Dakshin Maharashtra, Marathwada Marathi with variety of accents etc. The present research paper is an attempt to study the representation of Indian women in Regional Marathi cinema especially from submissive stereotype to non-conventional protagonist. The paper is a study various shades of women protagonist in select Marathi films like- Jait Re Jait, Umbartha, Astitva, Mukta, Mee Sindhutai Sapkal , Sairat, etc.

**Key Words:** Women protagonist, feminist, Marathi regional film Industry, revolt, unconventional, self assertion, womanhood, sisterhood.

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### Introduction

Indian film Industry is the largest film Industry in the world which produces around 2000 movies in a year in around twenty languages. According to Deloitte Indywood Indian Film Industry Report:

“The gross office Realizations of Indian film Industry is expected to reach U.S. \$ 3.7 Billion by 2020.” Bollywood Industry will reach the profit around 229 billion Indian rupees. Indian film Industry also known as Bollywood produces cinema in around twenty Indian regional languages including Hindi. Indian film Industry is the major source of revenue. Indian government gets forty-five per cent revenue from Hindi movies where as fifty five per cent from regional cinemas. Unlike Hollywood & Nollywood, India has nick names for their regional movies i.e. Bollywood-

Indian Hindi Film Industry, Bollywood- Punjabi Film Industry, Tollywood- Bengali Film Industry, Lillywood- Pakistan based film Industry in Mumnai & Kolkatta, Chollywood- Film industry in Chhattisgarh state, Tollywood- Film industry in Andhra Pradesh & Telanga, Kollywood- Tamil language film Industry, Mollywood- Malayalam Film Industry, Sandalwood- Kannada Language film Industry, Jollywood – Assamese Language film Industry, Ollywood- Film Industry of Oriya language, Dhollywood- Film Industry of Gujarati language etc. Marathi film Industry is the most influential regional film Industry in India. It has started flourishing its roots in the beginning of the twentieth century with the release of Raja Harishchandra (1913). Regional Marathi cinema has diversity in its dialect and accents. i.e. Puneri Marathi, Khandeshi Marathi, Vidarbhi Marathi, Konkani Marathi, Belgaon Marathi, Malwani Marathi, Marathwada Marathi etc. Even there is diversity in customs and rituals. The Hindi film Industry has depicted the various shades of Indian women in Indian context. Hindi film Industry has contributed remarkable women oriented movies on gender issues like- Mother India (1957), Bhumika (1977), Arth (1982), Mirch Masal (1985), Aakir kyon (1985), Damini (1993), Mrityudand (1997), Astitva (2000), Lajja (2001), Fashion, Dor (2006), Kahaani (2012), English Vinglish (2012), Queen (2014), Gulabgang (2014), Lipstick Under My Burkha (2017), Raazi (2018) and many more. Nargis, Shabana Azmi, Rekha, Smita Patil & Vidya Balan have created the impact on Indian audience by performing a character of women protagonist. They have started a trend of women protagonist who leads the whole film without any support of male character. Marathi film industry also creates special female oriented movies to highlight the gender issues in Indian social context. Marathi film industry is mushrooming its root with a creation of strong, sensitive, bold and revolutionary leading female character in remarkable movies like Jait Re Jait, Umbartha, Astitva, Mukta, Mee Sindhutai Sapkal, Sairat, etc.

**Dr. Jabbar Patel** has directed many remarkable award winning films. Jabbar Patel's **Jait Re Jait** (1977) (win win) based on a book Thakurwadi. The film is recipient of various accolade: Winner of Nation Film Award for best Marathi Film, filmfare award for Best Actress Smita Patil, Film Fare award for best Director –Jabbar Patel 1978, and Maharashtra State Film Award for best Director- Jabbar Patel. His film **Jait Re Jait** is a story about a tribal community known as Thakar. The movie is full of symbols. It highlights the beliefs of tribal community, their lifestyle, rituals, and their love for nature, their superstitious beliefs. Nagya (Mohan Aagash) is lead male character, who falls in love with Chindhi (Smita Patil) a protagonist of the movie, is a tribal

woman. Chindhi left her useless husband and prefer to live alone. When Chindhi found Nagya as a suitable life partner, she decides to remarry with Nagya. When her love flourishes with Nagya, she becomes a pregnant. Chindhi represents very determined character of tribal women who takes the decisions of her own life. Tribal community gives a rights and liberty to women to choose her own husband. It also gives rights to divorce and remarriage. When Chindhi found her husband irresponsible and useless she decides to break the wedding knot. When she found another suitable person for marriage she gets involved with him emotionally as well as physically. She decides to continue the pregnancy when she conceives a baby. The film highlights the instance of equality and liberty a tribal community give to the women. In Indian society, especially in upper caste and class, woman do not have right to choose her own life partner. Even divorce and remarriage is not allowed in many families. At the end of the film, Chindhi died due to honey bee attack. It is a paradox, Nagya in search of Queen honey-bee has lost her real life queen- Chindhi.

**Dr. Jabbar Patel's** another movie **Umbartha** (The Doorstep) proofed the milestone in the history of Marathi regional films. The movie was released in the year 1982. The movie is based on Marathi novel **Beghar** by **Shanta Nisal**. The film was released in bilingual languages – in Marathi as well as in Hindi language as *Subah*. *Umbartha* film, critically acclaimed, is the Recipient of various prestigious awards- National Film Award for best Feature Film in Marathi (1982). Maharashtra state Film award as a Best director- Jabbar Patel, Maharashtra State Film award Best Actress- Smita Patil. Sulabha Mahajan (Smita Patil) joins women's reformatory home as a superintendent and try to bring reform in the discipline, routine of women prisoners, and administration of reformatory home. The movie deals with gender issues like quest for woman's career in married life, sexual harassment of inmates of home by well established local political leader to satisfy their personal physical desires, illiteracy, unemployment, lesbian issue, oppose of system to work under women authority, oppose of spouse and in laws to the nature of work selected or chosen by wife. In Indian society people want educated in fact highly qualified wives. Indian family prefers a teaching profession for women who can look after the family as well as career. Women are always being opposed by their family to choose the career other than teaching where she cannot take responsibilities of domestic work and all family members. Definitely very rare women have rights to choose the career of their choice. Middle class and educated Sulabha's problem begins with her decision to take a career as a superintendent in remote area where she has to stay away from her family for this job. Many Indian women give up their career for the

sake of family. They sacrifice their desire to work in a particular profession or field as per their area of interest. Even many women do not acquire the education as per their own area of interest. Sulabha did not receive any moral and mental support for this job when she faces various problems. Subhash Mahajan involves in an extra marital affair to satisfy his physical need. At the point when Sulabha decides to leave her present job after controversy she realizes that her husband is not happy with her come back. Her mother in law blames her for her ignorance in family life. Her daughter does not like her presence in her life. Her sister in law gives her assurance that she will take care of her daughter like her own child. The changed attitude of the family members towards Sulabha raised the quest on her existence. Finally Sulabha decides to cross the boundaries of this broken married life and select the career to reform the life of inmates who really need her presence in their lives. A woman protagonist is career oriented, sensitive toward women's problems, raised the voice against women's exploitation, corruption, leadership skill oriented, tried her best level to get a support of her family especially from her husband but did not succeed. The film is a saga of many successful women who faced the failure in their married life but did not compromise their own self for the sake of marriage. She doesn't want to create her identity as a submissive wife, mother or daughter in law. The protagonist has broken the silence of her personal agony and decides to discover her own identity as a woman.

**Jabbar Patels' Mukta (1994)** revolves around Mukta (Sonali Kulkarni) the upper caste girl falls in a love with a Dalit leader. She was influenced by his Ambedkar ideology and Dalit movement. The film highlights social issue of castism of India & racism of America. Mukta, the woman protagonist of the film is more liberal and strongly believes in equality, fraternity, freedom and love. She has a black American friend who comes to visit India. Mukta's family dislikes her friendship with Julian and relationship with Milind Wagh shows the impact of castism and racism on the mind of upper caste educated family. At end of the movie Julian becomes the follower of Lord Vithhala & Rukmai and won the heart of Mukta's grandfather. Mukta convinced her orthodox father and family about her relationship with Milind. Mukta the female protagonist represents Indian women of modern India who has her independent ideology rather than the ideology imposed by family and society, a strong determined woman, sensitive toward the issues of castism, racism, gender discrimination, liberal and decision maker and taker of her own life.

**Mahesh manjarekar's Astitva (Existence)** bilingual movie released in 2000 in Marathi as well as Hindi Astitva movie was the recipient of National film award in 2000. To discover her own personality apart from her married life. Aaditi Shrikant patil is the lead protagonist of the film. Happily married life of Aaditi and Shrikant pandit gets ruined when Malhar kamat, a musician teacher left his ancestral property for Aditi. The film deals with complexities of human relations. It highlights the woman's physical and emotional desire, extra marital relations, and birth of a child out of illicit relations. The upper class house wife Aaditi's whole life revolves around her husband and son. After the devotion of 25 years of her married life her husband and even her son raised the quest on her morality. Her husband and son abuses her for her immorality. At the end of movie she discloses that when she was very young her husband had no time for their married life, for his wife. In the state of loneliness she gets attracted towards her music teacher. She had physical relations with him and Aniket is a son of Malhar. It was just for time being she loses control over her emotions for physical desire. Being human she was not able to resist her natural physical desire. Later she never meets him again. She has devoted her whole life for her family. At the end she decides to leave her husband and son who don't understand her sentiments, her devotion, and her love for the family. It is a journey of very submissive protagonist to rebel who decides to left her family to maintain her own dignity.

Director **Ananth Narayan Mahadevan**'s film **Mee Sindhutai Sapkal**(2010) is a biographical saga of the illiterate women protagonist Sindhutai Sapkal (Tejaswini Pandit) who belongs to backward caste and down trodden rural society. The movie depicts the life span journey of Sindhutai (real name – Chindhi), the victim of child marriage and domestic violence. Sindhutai was forced to marry at the age of ten with thirty years old man. She was brutally physically exploited by her elder husband from the age of ten. Her life story exposed the naked reality of child marriage. The Indian constitution has introduced a prohibition of the child marriage act. Even though in most of the rural part of India the practice of child marriage is very common. Indian constitution charges life imprisonment or heavy penalty for rape charges or in case of sexual intercourse with minor girl. In Indian hypocritical society marriages give the permission for sex with minor. Her husband was found guilty in the matter of infidelity and sent to the prison. Her husband, mother in law and even her mother accused her for illicit pregnancy. They all blame her as a characterless woman and prove guilty for her physical relations with other man. Over a night they all throw her out of house with false and humiliating allegations. The Indian hypocritical society gives a right to man

to break the marriage by humiliating or abusing a woman on the name character, her physical or emotional relationship with other man. The movie depicts the struggling of pregnant homeless Sindhutai who never lost a hope to survive. By begging and singing she earn for livelihood. Meanwhile homeless Sindhutai becomes eligible to provide a shelter to homeless children. This is a real story woman who fought against the suppression of women on every path of life and established her own identity as an individual. Actress Tejaswin Pandit has justified the role with her outstanding performance. The film was recipient of various awards including National Film Award, Special Jury Award, National film Fare award for best Screen Play.

Director **Nagraj Manjule**'s **Sairat** (2016) (wild in love) was one of the blockbuster movie of the Marathi film industry. This film is a one of the masterpiece by emerging master film-maker Nagraj Manjule, who tackle the contemporary issue of honor killing, castism, class- difference in Indian social, political and economic context. Nagraj Manjule portrayed the challenging character of Archi with a simplicity and broaden the horizon of Indian women. The film has achieved wild acclaim Marathi as well as non- Marathi audience and also at national as well as International level. The story revolves around the protagonist Archana (Rinku Rajguru) – the upper caste and class, college going girl falls in love with Parshya - a lower caste and class boy. Nagraj Manjule has created very challenging character of Archana in the history of Indian film Industry. Nagraj has depicted a strong determined, bold, leadership skills oriented and straightforward character of Archana who falls in love with boy of lower caste. Protagonist of the movie revolts against her own family who opposed her love. She fought against the social norms of society and family. She believes in humanism and love. The protagonist is bold enough to take the decision of her own life. She has a confidence to live the life on her own conditions. Instead of compromising with situation she chooses to lead life of her own choice. Woman protagonist possess the qualities of hero where as Parshya possess the quality of submissive heroine. Woman protagonist is fond of scooty & bike riding, swimming, horse riding, playing and dancing. Archana eloped with Parshya to another state where they start their new life. In Hyderabad state they learned to speak Telgu language. The movie ends with the tragedy of honor killing. The movie was also remade in various Indian regional languages: In Hindi- Dhadak (2018), In Bengali Noor Jahaan (2017), in Kannada (Manasu Mallihey) (2017), In Punjabi (Channa Mereya) (2017), In Odia (Laila O Laila) (2017). The film established the record of profit in Marathi film Industry.

Dr. **Milind Lele's Bandishala** (2016) reveal the tale of woman protagonist - prison officer Madhavi Sawant (Mukta Barve) who try to bring the reform in the prison by introducing discipline. It is highly challenging task for her to deal with male prisoners, their non co-operative attitude toward female and honest authority officer. The leading character of the woman has chosen the career as a police officer. Her family and especially her husband have a full support for her job. They have adopted a daughter from Muslim family. Firmly dealing with high profile criminal as well as corrupt authority who is involved in prison malpractice makes her the victim of the gang rape. This incident raised the question on safety of common as well as high profile and prestigious woman. The protagonist has broken down by the incident. Due to the gang rape the victim goes through the physical, mental and emotional trauma. During the court hearing, when the victim narrate the incident she again experience traumatic and humiliated questions and comments by the lawyer of convicts. The protagonist rise up morally and took charge of her duty and give the punishment to the criminals who were involved in the conspiracy of rape. The jail authority, contractor and prisoners had a grudge against Madhavi who tried to stop their malpractices and goon battles in the jail. They have decided to teach her a lesson by this incident. This incident raises the question on the thinking of male patriarchal society who considers the rape as a punishment to teach her a lesson or to crush a woman morally down. Use of rape as an element to satisfy the male superior ego raises the quest on male psychology. According to Times of India: 'Every day 92 women are raped in India'. It is really very traumatic for women to overcome through the incident and leave the normal life.

**Uttarayan (2005), Double Seat, Doghi, Jogawa, Sumbaran, Gandh, Amhi Doghi(2018), Vazandar, Muramba, Nude, Restaurant, Tya Ratri Paus hota, Nude etc.**– these films portrayed very significant leading woman protagonist who challenges the traditional norms of Indian society. The all are independent, rebel, and in search of their own identity. Many of them are sharing the bond of womanhood and sisterhood.

**The finding** reveals that the women are considered to be the weaker gender as well as object of sex, pleasure and child bearer especially male child. Women are dependent on man for survival.

Indian women have proved their excellence by their unusual contribution in various fields of the universe. In this twenty first century simultaneously she performs the multiple roles of wife, mother, sister, daughter, daughter in law etc. as well as a career oriented women. Indian

traditional values have ingeniously imposed the role and duties to be performed by Indian female. It also embeds the image of good woman in the mind of Indian male. Her identity is associated with her relations with other member in the family. As per the Indian traditional values are concerned women has to play a submissive role in the family as well as society. In most of the religions i. e. Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist women should take responsibilities of kitchen, household work. Indian woman has to perform the role of committed housewife, the unpaid worker, has to perform her role throughout her life without taking a single day leave. Many religions give a priority only to male child. Indian woman always has to sacrifice her own hobbies, interest for the sake of interest of the family members. Woman has no rights to give suggestions or ideas to family. There is no place for desire of women in Indian society. In many Indian families there is no value for her suggestions, ideas & individuality. Women are supposed to live surrender life. In Indian patriarchal society she faces uncountable challenges to create her own identity as an individual. Even in the twenty first century the society expects women to perform conventional role of obedient women. Many Indian women are subject to domestic violence, suspicious husband's abusing on her character, victim of rape. Marathi film industry has come up with the contemporary gender issues of freedom, equality, respect, and honor. Indian mass media like television, internet, social sites, advertisement, cinema, serial programme projects the women on the screen as an object of sex, pleasure, or either show or antic piece. Projection of female body on media is one of the contemporary issues. Female has to maintain her figure for the sake of husband. If she gains the weight or fatty elements of the body are subject to criticism from husband, family, friends and society. Woman figure, her virginity, her look, physical appearance, her complexion, her decorum, her menstruation cycle, child bearing capability, morality, her career (work designation) are prime criteria of her selection for marriage.

The cinema has positive as well as negative and impact on the mind of the audience either for short or long term. Marathi film Industry may use cinema to as an effective medium to inculcate moral human values amongst the audience of Maharashtra State. It can play significant role in spreading the message of national integrity and gender equality.

#### **Objectives of the present research paper:**

1. To study the Marathi regional cinema in brief
2. To study the women protagonist characters of select Marathi regional films



3. To study the unconventional role of women protagonist
4. To sensitize the people toward contemporary gender issues in Indian social context.

### **Research Methodology:**

The researcher has applied analytical research methodology. The researcher has collected the required information from secondary data available in reports, books, internet and journals.

### **Suggestions:**

1. Marathi film industry should depict the realistic picture of contemporary women in social, political, economic Indian context.
2. Marathi cinema should Portrayed the character of rebel women or protagonist who challenges and raises the question against all the social and cultural norms.
3. It is a need of time to treat woman as an individual rather than present her as a mother, daughter, wife & sister.
4. This is a time to give her opportunity to discover her own self rather than imposed by the society and family.
5. Regional Marathi cinema has to project the physical, mental, emotional, psychological and economical desire of women.
6. Marathi cinema raised the quest for her identity as a woman.
7. Marathi cinema should play a significant role in presenting woman as a stronger determined character who knows her limitations as well as her strength.
8. Marathi cinema provides a platform for equality and liberty of women in Indian society.
9. Marathi cinema should helps to break the silence of women and also help to express her as a woman and individual.
10. Film makers can use the cinema as an effective resource of media to mould conventional opinions by reconstructing cultural values. Cinema is the effective medium to widen the horizon of women's existence in the universe.
11. Marathi Film Industry must stop to depict women character as a villain who set the conspiracy against family members and poisonous the minds of family members rather than should create the characters who share the bond of love, care & understanding. Their woman characters must spread the message of womanhood & sisterhood,
12. Marathi film industry should come up with various contemporary subjects like single motherhood, lesbians, singlehood, Sisterhood etc.

13. The Marathi film industry must give an equivalent weight age to female and male character and treat them like an equal individual.

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