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Shame on Patriarchy: A Theoretical Analysis of *Lajja*

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent of patriarchy and its impact on traditional society highlighting some tones in the Hindi film *Lajja*. This paper discusses *Lajja* which carries the miseries, sorrows, and oppression of women in traditional societies, using the Radical Feminist lens. This study is a critique of the oppressive nature of masculinity with some bad traditions that compel the women to live with an unwanted agreement, and involve in sex. I argue that a person can't be a woman by birth. Janaki (Madhuri), who has been the victim of male chauvinism and material abuse, is the protagonist who deserves the Radical Feminism in the third theme of the film. This theoretical study tries to unmask the hypocritical, shameful and criminal patriarchy in traditional society practiced for centuries.

Keywords: Hindi film *Lajja*, Hippocratic tradition, Mythology, Patriarchy, Radical feminism, Ramayana

Introduction

Lajja is a Hindi film that battles against patriarchy in developing countries such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and so on. This film highlights some female issues that shock everyone when it is judged neutrally. In the film, the rebellious character Janaki (Madhuri) becomes pregnant out of wedlock. She shuts down the slut-shaming activities of society. The patriarchy in traditional society, which takes a woman as a

matter of sex and a machine to reproduce babies, might oppress the women in the name of tradition, culture, social norms, and values. Janaki complains that each man should shame patriarchy.

The previous research on the Hindi film *Lajja* has highlighted liberation and Marxist/ socialist feminism. However, my interest goes into the third theme of the film, the theme of Janaki (Madhuri), because I couldn't find any research that has examined it through the Radical Feminist lens.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the third theme of *Lajja* Hindi film, which is associated with Janaki (Madhuri) using Radical Feminism, and to unmask the hypocritic and criminal-like patriarchy in traditional society practiced for centuries.

Introduction to *Lajja* and the Radical Feminism

Lajja is a Hindi-language feature film released in 2001 and directed by Rajkumar Santoshi. This multi stars movie, with a big budget, is based on the Ramayana, around the female character Sita. It narrates the story of four different women whom the hypocritic men exploited for their selfish gains. The names of the main four characters (Vaidehi, Maithili, Janaki, and Ramdulari) are all different versions of Sita. They project a powerful instance in the film. The film became very successful overseas in comparison to the home country because the high court of New Delhi banned cable operators from exhibiting the film all over India till February 8, 2002. The case was filed stating that Janaki (Madhuri), as Sita, revolted against the Hindu mythology craved in Ramayana (Times, 2001). Janaki dares to live by unconventional rules of her own.

The director Rajkumar Santoshi shows the various nuances of the injustices against Sita. In the film, Santoshi (2001) has made it very shameful to the patriarchal men. There are four themes in the film. The four themes deserve the three lenses of feminism i.e. Liberal feminism, Marxist/Socialist feminism, and Radical feminism. Janaki (Madhuri) holds the third theme that is directly linked with the stage drama of Ramayana. This theme occupies 42 minutes that begins from 1 hour 39 minutes to 2 hours 21 minutes of the complete film.

Feminists view sex and gender as different spheres: sex as biological reality and gender as a socially constructed form. Wittig (1997) claims that the idea of a natural group of women based on the body is a result of social and sexual oppression. Feminism is generally viewed in different dimensions: Liberal Feminism (that

tackles inequality by utilizing existing systems- legal reform), Radical Feminism (admits the dissimilarities between men and women and views that women should themselves go against sex discrimination), and Marxist/Socialist Feminism (Women are exploited by both capitalism and men).

Radical feminism was generally introduced in the 1960s as a challenge to liberal and Marxist feminism, and it was developed in the notion of sexism which is the central form of all kinds of oppression (Buckdoud & Tapp, 2014). The major difference between Radical Feminism and other branches is that Radical feminists don't concentrate on equalizing the distribution of power. Instead, they focus their efforts on eliminating patriarchy by transforming the entire structure of society. They want to get rid of the traditional gender role.

Literature Review

Patriarchy, which has been practiced in traditional societies for centuries, controls women for the vested interests of men. This hypocritic tradition has been logically presented in the Hindi film *Lajja*. Misra (2001) published an article on *Lajja* Hindi film, in which he highlighted more the four women characters who were oppressed by the customs of a male-dominated society. Likewise, Adarsh (2001) highlighted more on a pregnant Janaki (Madhuri) facing the annoyance and fury of the crowd and her subsequent miscarriage on the street. He added that Janaki dares to live by her own unconventional rules. She challenges the patriarchal concepts in the *Ramayana*, a great Hindu religious book. Ramkissoon (2009) critically observed the four major characters of the film *Lajja*. She generally criticized the whole film and concluded that women should not be depicted as only sexual and biological creatures, especially by the character of *Vaidehi*. She has ascertained how the film has taken Hinduism, mythology, notions of family and tradition, and the features of patriarchy. Pauwels and Aklujkar (2010) addressed the modern ideals of feminism in *Lajja* Hindi films based on equality and individualism by questioning the injustice heaped upon Sita by Janaki (Madhuri). Sinha and Chauhan (2013) explored that *Lajja* has cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral components which have made the film a multilayered, multifaceted, and complex construct. Similarly, they attempted to deconstruct the *Lajja* as a maker of Indian womanhood.

Furthermore, Qamar (2015) critically examined the Bollywood feministic film *Lajja* as the honor, shame, and modesty of a woman in Indian popular culture. He has offered a socio-cultural analysis of that film. Generally, he examined the film and analyzed some discriminatory tenets for women such as women as an entity

of reproduction, the dowry practices, ascribed chastity, and violence of discrimination. He tried to uncover the gendered issues in Indian society having their roots in religious and cultural traditions. Additionally, Sarkar (2016) indicated in the film *Lajja* that the four Indian women have been the victims of various plights with ill-treatment coming from different economic and social strata. Likewise, Chakraborty (2016) critically examined the whole film through the feminist lens in a general way. He elaborated on the feminist issues of women in traditional society. He talked about four strong female leads, who were battling patriarchy in their ways.

The literature concerned with the Hindi film *Lajja* has generally highlighted the story as a whole. They critically examined based on Indian cultures in a broad term. Chakraborty (2016) somehow entered the gravity of analysis critically into some important dialogues that represent feminism. But he has not analyzed through any specific feminist lens. Sarkar (2016) somehow indicated Marxist/ Socialist Feminism, highlighting the economic and social strata. But the analysis is very peripheral. Ramkissoon (2009) analyzed the film through liberal feminism. But she couldn't enter into the gravity of the film. I couldn't find any writings on the film *Lajja* from the Radical feminist perspective. Here, I want to critically analyze the third theme concerned with Janaki (Madhuri) of the film entering into its core gravity through the Radical Feminist lens.

Analysis

Janaki (Madhuri), who is the protagonist of this theme, is a stage actress. She desires to live in her world. She meets Vaidehi (Manisha) who has been victimized by the suffering in a world dominated by men. She is pregnant and informs Vaidehi as “*Mera dusra mahina chal raha hai... Kya dekh rehi ho mangal sutra or sindur, sadi nahi hui hai avi tak, lekin agle mahine ho jayegi.*” (Santoshi, 2001). (I am running in the second month...what are you looking at, *Mangal sutra*¹ or *Sindur*²? We haven't married even now-We will marry next month.) Janaki (Madhuri) wants to move forward than the traditional norms, values, and rituals. Without marriage, she has been pregnant. It is a very big challenge to adjust to any woman in a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society, wives are observed as subordinate, and deferential. Finlay and Clarke (2016) have critiqued the discourses of love, romance, and coupledness that surround the institution of marriage. They further opine that marriage is like a social contract in which the domination over women by men, and the right of men to relax

¹ A necklace that the groom ties around the bride's neck in the marriage

² A traditional red or orange-red colored cosmetic powder usually worn by the married Hindu women along the part of their front hair

equal sexual access to women is considered an issue, whereas marriage and female loyalty are basic requirements for heterosexual relationships in a patriarchal society. For example, in the *Lajja* film, Janaki is practical in the case of sexuality. Therefore, she has struggled with some social taboos of traditional society.

Purusottam is a character with the nature of a patriarchal society, who wants to establish his empire by exploiting women sexually and socially. He humiliates his wife saying, "*Lata tumko kehi nahi pata. Mai tumko Adarsha patni banana cha ta hun*" (Lata you don't know anything. I want to make you an Ideal wife). What a shameful patriarchal thought he has! He has fully controlled his wife, putting her in his homely cage. He doesn't even allow his wife to look through the window. But he intends to follow other women in his drama company for a sexual purpose. Sultana (2010) explored that women are the subordinate sex class under patriarchal domination. Radical Feminist beliefs are based on the idea that the main cause of women's oppression originates from social roles and institutional structures being constructed from male supremacy and patriarchy. Equally, Purushottam has a patriarchal ideology to suck the women physically and mythologically.

Moreover, Manish is also a stage actor and the lover of Janaki who has promised her to marry him. He informs her to have an abortion of the child after he suspects that the unborn baby belongs to Purushottam. He denies marrying her saying, "*Dekho Janaki is bareme mere ghar walo kya sochenge, najane log kya kahenge... ye bacha hame nahi chahiye*" (Look Janaki, what my family will think about it, I don't know what the people will react... I don't want this baby). Janaki complains Manish, "*Ye ghar wale, ye log kahan se aagaye ye sab, unse puch ke mujhse pyar kiya tha?*" (From where did the family, the people emerge; Did you love me asking them all?). Here, Janaki falls in the optimum tense because of Manish's conservative thought. Radical-cultural feminists theorize that the cause of women's oppression is not the reproductive possibilities but rather it is the jealousy of men toward women and their reproductive abilities, which is developed by the so-called patriarchal thoughts (Saracino, 2018). Manish wants to accept her if she is ready to abort the baby. The expression of Manish justifies that there are some cultural barriers to discriminating the male and females in the patriarchal society.

Janaki opines confidently to Vaidehi, "*Bat meri charitra ki hai, meri aatma samman ki hai. U sabut chata hai Meri sachhaika mere pyar ka, pariksha lena chata he meri, mai kaha se la ke diu?*" (The matter doesn't belong to my character. It is about my self-dignity. He wants proof of my love. He wants to take my exam. From where can I bring the proof?) How can Janaki prove that the unborn baby belongs to Manish? Graham (1998)

elaborated that natural production is neither in women's best interests nor in those of the children produced.

Reproducing children is the major obligation of women to be oppressed and this process has limited the women's ability to be full human persons. The overall suffering of Janaki centers around Tong's Radical-Libertarian Feminism. Her self-dignity also seems weaker because she is pregnant. But the Radical Feminists take a clear position on the right to women's reproductive justice. Here, Janaki takes an unequivocal stance on behalf of the reproduction of the baby.

Manish (as Ram) blames to Janaki (as Sita), *"Tum lanka me parapurush se rahekar aai ho, tumhare charitra par sandehaka abasar upasthit hota hai. Athahe mai tumhe nahi apna sakta."* (You came after staying with a man in Lanka. There is a doubt in your character. So I can't accept you.). In the Hindu religious epic 'Ramayana', Ram doubted Sita and she had to give a test to prove her chastity. The social taboo of the then time robbed Sita of her domestic felicity (Variyar, 2018). The second-wave feminist Vukoičić (2013) states that Radical Feminism is based on patriarchal grounds, and she further analyzes that the social system based on the power struggle between the sexes is considered to be the root cause of all kinds of oppression, inequality, and injustice. Here Ram blames Sita based on social norms and criticisms of patriarchal ideology that there might be a sexual relationship between Sita and Rawan. The discrimination between men and women might be the result of our traditional, and hypocritical religious books such as; Ramayana (Sita), and Mahabharat (Draupadi).

Janaki (as Sita) declares with Manish (as Ram), *"Ham pati patni dono hi alag raha rehe hain Dono hi agni parichha denge"* (We both husband and wife have stayed separately. So, we both have to go through the ordeal.). Janaki dares to revolt against the partiality. She inquires about the dignity of all women and wants to be an equal shareholder with men. She highlights the bad tradition of a patriarchal society that only women have to be tested, and questions why not men be tested. Hindu cosmology asserts that the only way for women to attain liberation is to carry out their duty toward their spouses. If they are far from their husband, they can be suspected (Boruah, 2008). Janaki signifies that not only the women go with men but men also can go with women for sexual matters. If so, why is the ordeal only for women? She arises a prominent question. She tries to unmask the artificial curtain covered by the criminal mythology.

Janaki blames all patriarchal males with Vaidehi, *"Jo bat inko kano ko aacha lage, jo bat inki manko rijhaye, wohi bolte raho, to sarpar baithakar puja karenge, kahenge devi hai, or jisdin apne man ki bat kahidi,*

to kahenge kulta hai, charitra hin hai". (The matter that males hear nice, the matter that touches their heart with pleasure, if we speak such, they keep us on the head, they say us 'the Devi³' or the day we speak our mind, they say we are mad, or characterless). The men think of women as puppets. Eckel and Grossman (1998) found from their research that women become more socially orientated, but men become individually orientated. Likewise, women donate twice as much as men to their anonymous people. The influence of culture, tradition, norms, and values in a patriarchal society makes men selfish of women. Janaki opposes this archaic superiority of men in the scene.

Purushottam feared Janaki saying that she insulted the Hindu philosophy. (*"Tune dharm ka apaman kiya hai"*). He means that Janaki should follow all and every norm and value created by a hypocritic society. Sultana (2010) states that women had to be domesticated and confined to establish the right of the father, and their sexuality had to be regulated and controlled to satisfy the desire of men. She directly attacks the traditional philosophy that has governed our society even now. Janaki directly rejects such a trapping statement of Purushottam.

Janaki violently refuses Purushottam's blame, saying that the asylum is better than such nonsense hypocritic society. *"sirf ek sawal uthaya hai maine jo sadiyaun se har aurat ka man pe aa raha hai. Jawaf dete nahi, ... jan lene par utar aaye mard. Dharma ken nam par apana swartha pura karne wale eeisa pakhandi, jalil, gawar log ke sath jine se to pagal khana behetar hai."* (I have raised only one issue which was in the mind of every woman from the century. The men can't answer, but they come to kill the women. It is better to stay in the asylum rather than stay with such hypocritic, criminal, and wicked people). Radical feminism suggests formulating new ways of theorizing women's relationship with men, and men's control of women via various mechanisms i.e. violence, heterosexuality, and reproduction is emphasized (Maynard, 1995). Additionally, females from different oppressed groups experience a grouping of oppression for centuries in the name of religion. They have to question each hypocritic norm and value of patriarchal society and challenge every issue of gender discrimination.

Janaki addresses the protestants (the mass), *"Sdiyaun se aurat sati hoti aa rahi hai. Kabhi kahi mard kuda hai aag me apni aurat ke liye. Kohi karba Chauth bana hai inke liye. Pakhandi."* (Women have been

³ A Sanskrit work to represent goddess

satiated for centuries. Has a man reached the fire for any woman? Have men kept the fasting of *Karwa Chauth*⁴ for women? Hypocritic.). Mythology signifies that this fast (*Karwa Chauth*) is observed by married women for the well-being and long life of their husbands from sunrise to moonrise. Shah (2016) complains about *Karwa Chauth* suggesting that it is time for Indian women to leave such archaic and patriarchal customs behind. Janaki is on Shah's side. What a revolutionary talk she has. She gives a very powerful statement on behalf of women. Radical Feminists believe in an autonomous women's movement as the path to women's liberation. It is believed that the theory and action are developed from the lived reality of females who have been socialized into womanhood.

Conclusion

Patriarchy is the main complication of women's progression and development that keeps a woman as a machine to reproduce and an object to have sexual pleasure. It has been the shame of the 21st Century in the World. The movie *Lajja* depicts how women are jeopardized based on sex and based on traditionality which is identical to religion. The protest of the audience in the theme declares the patriarchal thoughts in a male-dominated society. The patriarchal norms do not let women fulfill their aspirations. Later, they have to repress their deep inner cravings which would eventually turn into virtual deprivation and thus become a way of their living.

Radical Feminism is a drive against sexual partiality in traditional society. The Radical Feminists believe that men and women are biologically different but socially and culturally equal. They claim that the patriarchal society has presented women as inferior to males in each discursive practice. They oppose all the traditional gender roles that have a vested interest in justifying and preserving patriarchal superiority. In this way, I conclude this paper requesting each woman to raise her voice against the shameful patriarchal society.

⁴ A one-day Hindu festival celebrated by women esp. in India four days after the full moon in November for the longevity of their husbands without having any food.

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