

## Chapter 3

### Intertextuality and films

#### 3.1 Understanding intertextuality:

Intertextuality is a term that describes the connection between two texts (texts from the past or contemporary texts) or textual conventions in their composition. Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the term implies that all texts, in a broad sense, are intertextual. This however makes it difficult to quote instances of intertextual references in films which are brimming with all the elements of intertextuality such as plagiarism, epigraph, allusion or pastiche. Intertextuality can also be read as the attitude or the stance of the later text to the preceding one (Shastri 2011: 32-34).

The concept of intertextuality, as advocated by Kristeva, is based on the Bakhtinian notion that every utterance is interdependent and interrelated with what has previously been said within a socio-political textual environment. Films as a form of art borrow heavily from the already prevalent customs, social and literary traditions. Films build a self-conscious intertextual relation with already available texts and discourses. The filmmaker takes the subject and plot of their stories from the available resources around them—socio-cultural traditions, political and economic system, literature, fables, legends and prevalent beliefs. Thus, the audience's understanding or comprehensibility is essential for an intertextual reference to be perceived as successful. It is when the spectator is actively involved in the process of reading a series of interpretations and meanings emerge from a text that is read intertextually (ibid.). Perhaps, the best way to describe intertextuality would be to say that it refers to its conscious use by the director/author.

Self-referentiality has been a regular feature of films, opening a plethora of allusions to which they can possibly refer. Various genres, styles, characters and actors have over the decades created a repository which every filmmaker can

make use of. It is at the prerogative of the filmmaker to decide the reasons for the use of such self referentiality in films. For some it may be to build a bond and strengthen the narrative while for others it may be emancipatory or distancing strategies (Withlam 2003).

Hinting at the intertextual nature of films, film theorist Christian Metz had suggested that films are a textual system that is complete within itself and the author, if at all present, is only a part of the system (Awung 2002). Films have indeed borrowed from literature, social practices, traditions and customs, *a-priori* film and media texts. Films thus exist in a system where its content is consciously or involuntarily borrowed from other texts, including films. Literary texts have always been a great source of cinematic content. Literary adaptation of films is a long established tradition in cinema. In fact by 1910s adaptation of established literary texts had become a marketing maneuver by which producers and exhibitors could legitimize cinema-going as an artistic endeavour. While some film texts liked to maintain a hundred percent fidelity to the original literary text some liked to play with the original story to create a new narrative (Singh 2007: 28-54). Jane Austin's novels have inspired many movies in cinemas across countries. When American filmmaker Orson Welles made *Othello* into a film in 1952, it was almost an exact replication of Shakespeare's classic play. But the same play was used to create a new and contemporary storyline by Indian film director Vishal Bharadwaj, reinterpreting the original text in the light of Indian sensibility and ethos. His *Omkara* (2006) adapts the classic English play to the twenty-first century Indian setting.

Contemporary theorists believe that texts lack any independent meaning and must be read in relation to other texts. To quote Graham Allen, "Reading ... becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext" (2000: 2-3).

The roots of intertextuality can be traced back to the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Southwell 2012). Saussure said that

linguistic signs are arbitrary and exist within a system and produce meaning through their similarity to and difference from other signs (Saussure 1998: 833). The creation of an author thus cannot be perceived to allude to one theological connotation but exist in a system of varied meanings (Simandan 2010: 19). According to Roland Barthes, when an author uses a particular word, it does not express a single meaning but leads to a network of possible discourses that seem to emanate from a number of possible perspectives giving rise to intertextuality, far beyond the authorial intention.

Roland Barthes<sup>7</sup> said that the text is 'a passage, traversal' (Barthes 1989: 59) of meanings. The theory of text thus also alludes to a theory of intertextuality as the text is not simply engraved with meanings but also is product of many intertwining discourses. The text is also shaped from the already existent meanings. However, Barthes cautioned against the assumption that intertextuality same as the origin of the text. The origins of the text are the sources and influences of the work and the references that are there in a text are unsigned, unspecified, faint and but already read. Barthes calls the author a scriptor who does not release a single theological meaning but arranges and compiles from that is already there, read and spoken. The site of the creation is a complex space where many other writings and creations intermingle. (Allen 2000: 71). Barthes's *Death of the Author* and *From Work to Text* propound his position on intertextuality. He also believed that meaning is not the product of the author but generates 'from the language viewed intertextually'. It is the active and creative readers, the 'writers of the text' who relates the text to another and provides the base for the theory of intertextuality (Simandan 2011).

The term intertextuality came up during the 1960s as there was a shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. It was Julia Kristeva who is understood to use the term intertextuality for the first time. Kristeva developed her theory of

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<sup>7</sup> *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes is a landmark essay that opposes the trends of connecting a text solely with the author. Language as well the experiences of the reader exerts considerable influencing in reading and extracting meaning from a text. In *From Work to Text*, Barthes said that a piece of work is a concrete substance that may be found in a few pages whereas a text is the arrangement of meaning from a work.

intertextuality with inspiration from Bakhtin who said that no utterance is independent and their meaning and logic are dependent upon what has already been said and how it is received by others. All utterances, according to him, are responses to earlier utterances and are addressed to specific addressees. Based on Bakhtin's idea of dialogism Kristeva develops her theory of intertextuality. She questioned the idea of stable signification and said that the texts that authors construct do not come of their own minds but are a product of the previously existent texts. Kristeva's seminal work *The Bounded Text* has been the source of reference for all intertextual studies.

### **3.2 Film: text and intertext**

In *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Robert Stam points out to the traces of textual analysis to biblical studies. But it has been theorists like Levi-Strauss, Derrida and Roland Barthes who have taken textual analysis to the level of an academic discourse.

Films are texts that tell stories, have characters and contain messages (Voller and Widdows 1993). The concept of the film text emerged as a corollary to the literary interpretations of the idea of a text. The idea of film text brought it the respect that was so far applicable only to literature. Stam also points out that textual analysis of films would lead to auteurism as auteurs or authors write text. The film text, according to him, is not just a 'random slice of life' but a structured discourse (2000: 186).

Textual analysis in films has been influenced by structuralism, narratology, psychoanalysis, Prague School aesthetics and literary deconstruction. Thus, Metz, Barthes, Lacan, Propp became the base for film analysis. Stam cites the examples of some early attempt at textual analysis of film: Marie-Claire Ropars Wulleumier's analysis of *India Song* and *October*, Julia Lesage's study of Renoir's *Rules of Games* using Barthes' 'five codes' (Stam et al. 1992: 55).

The study of text declined in the 1980 poststructuralist influences giving rise to the concept of intertext. Building on Kristeva's theory of intertextuality films began to be read as related to other texts and cinema had a gamut of artistic traditions to relate to. In its frame is engraved human history, civilization,

philosophy, thoughts and beliefs. A film like *Rajneeti* (2010) not only depicts the political scenario of contemporary India but goes back centuries to render a modern rendering of the *Mahabharata*. Farah Khan's directorial venture *Om Shanti Om* (2007) borrows, refers, alludes and pays tribute to the rich cinematic history of the Mumbai (Bombay) film industry. Another Bollywood film directed by Anurag Basu was *Barfi* (2012) that made various covert allusions to many national and international legends in film making. The two notable figures of film history in the film were Raj Kapoor and Charlie Chaplin. Likewise literary adaptation of fictional characters also gives rise to intertextual reading in cinema. Byomkesh Bakshi, a fictional character developed by Bengali writer Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay has been represented in cinema as well television. The recent installment in the film adaptation of this fictional character had been by filmmaker Dibakar Banerjee in his 2015 film *Detective Byomkesh Baksy!* It is not just influence or source but intertextuality in films is a mixture of all genres, discourses and art. It is not only the subject matter that it takes into consideration but also its own form. Intertextuality frees films from the boundaries of genre and allows filmmakers to play with form and content. There is a to and fro movement to pre-existing texts and discourses. Feminism as a concept and ideology has been woven into the film narrative by directors like Deepa Mehta, Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi, Manju Borah. Films like *Working Girls* (1986), *Water* (2006) are replete with feminist interventions. The tale of the impoverished blended with the tales of the women in *Rudaali* (a social) and it can be read as an example of a social hybrid directed by Kalpana Lajmi with strong feminist motifs.

Instead of being limited to one medium, intertextuality allows films to bond and blend with other arts and media. Intertextuality relates a singular text to other systems of representation. The Hollywood sci-fi films with a blend of horror or action, creating an assemblage of moving images, are perhaps the best example of genre blend in cinema. The *Resident Evil* series mixes the myth of the undead with science fiction.

María Jesús Martínez Al faro writes, "There are always other words in a word, other texts in a text. The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we

understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures” (1996: 268). In studying films as well we are to remember the long cultural and literary histories that have fed the narrative of the films. In studying the contemporary we must remember the lineage that film history has left for the posterity.

Intertextual references in cinema also include the presence of one film’s style in the other, the style of one director, ways of filmmaking in another. Hitchcock’s famous shower scene from *Psycho* has been used and reproduced (acknowledged or not) in films across genres and languages (Stam 2000: 207). *Psycho* has been remembered in the business of film making in many ways, whether by remaking, parodying or paying homage. It has resonated through the many films that have been made after Hitchcock. These remakes or allusions to Hitchcock’s classics indicate an interest of the viewers in the original work and their readiness to reread them as well. As Constantine Verevis has written, “if Hitchcock’s work holds for its viewers some ongoing fascination, then it is perhaps because these viewers remake the work in its every reviewing, and this re-viewing may be no more or less than the genre labeled ‘remake’ ” (2006: 76). Verevis’s comment points towards the intertextual reading of a text that the film viewers indulge in.

According to Gerard Genette intertextuality is the operative presence of two texts in the form of quotation, plagiarism and allusion. Another literary theorist Harold Bloom talks about an artist’s relation to predecessors. He says that literary art develops out of an interpersonal and generational struggle with strong Oedipal overtones. This view has been critiqued by feminists as it leaves no place for intertextual readings of a women writer’s work in relation to her literary mother (Stam 2000: 211).

Films in the postmodern era are fundamentally intertextual. There is a conscious mix of genre, artistic style, elements and others in the film text that roam in the vast realm of texts already written or produced. Films can make subtle, explicit, unconscious or thoughtful use of intertextuality. Stereotyped

frames, images or iconographical images also constitute the intertextual dimension in the analyses of a film. Literary texts also become the foundation and inspiration for film stories, screenplays and characters as well. Films also refer to other films and filmmakers often adapt or are inspired by the works of their fellow filmmakers or predecessors (Allen 2000: 174-177).

Intertextual relation between cinema and literature has been ever existent. There have been innumerable allusions to the characters of Shakespeare's plays or Swift's *Gulliver's Travel* in films around the world. In the Indian film industry there are unmistakable traces of the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata along with local myths and folklores. Film theorist Christian Metz holds that all films are mixed sites deploying both cinematic and non-cinematic codes. To him, films are not product of or dependent on vague romantic forces like inspiration and genius. Films are an adaptation of the various socially available discourses (Stam 2000: 188).

Intertextuality as a theory has been used in the interpretation of many non-literary arts, including cinema. According to Keith A Reader, intertextuality can be used in cinema to study aspects like the Hollywood star system. The star system, according to him relies on an alliance of similarities and difference between films and also on the likeness between the on screen and off screen traits. The 2011 Oscar winning animated feature film, *Rango* is replete with memories from early Westerns including Sergio Leone's *Dollars* trilogy.

Similarities can be drawn between the film director and the literary writer. A director's works can be read in connection to another even through different genres. Keith A Reader writes that Howard Hawks's *El Dorado* is a lively example of intertextuality as the work is based and a follow up on the Hawk's earlier film, *Rio Bravo*. Reader also writes about Jean Renoir's adaptation of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* that it was originally conceived as a televised drama. Renoir titled his adaption as *Le Testament du Docteur Cordelier* and is a classic example of intertextuality where the same text has been adapted into two forms of media and with numerous references to other films in the filmic text. Reader compares his own reading experience of the Stevenson's novella *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and

subsequent watching of the Renoir film. He watched the film later and again read the text which invoked certain personal emotions in him—an experience which was intertextual. Reader gives credit to Renoir for invoking intertextual reading in him as the spectator but does not give him the status of a God like author. (Reader 1991: 176-188).

Umberto Eco in his paper *Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage* opines that *Casablanca*, which has now gained a cult status, is a great example of “cinematic discourse, a palimpsest for the future students of twentieth-century religiosity, a paramount laboratory for semiotic research in textual strategies” (1985: 3). Eco says that in order to be a cult a work must be able to be rearranged so that the parts can be remembered regardless of the whole. This can be done very easily and manually in a book but in the case of a film it is already a combination of parts that is fragmented and unsteady. To be a cult film, a film should not have one central idea but many; it should be a composition of philosophy. Eco further mentions that a cult film must be disjoined from the point of view of production; it must display certain textual connections beyond the consciousness of the producer and thus become a living example of intertextuality. The viewer must suspect that it is not the work of a true author and must believe that works are created by works, texts are created by texts, and all together they speak to and with one another independently of the intentions of their authors. A cult film is the proof that cinema comes from cinema (ibid. 4).

The Indian film *Sholay* (1975) perhaps best reflects Eco’s observations. Set in a rural background the film evokes memories of the early Westerns, with background scores being an easy reminder. Though the film evaded initial popularity, later it built a lineage of followers, elevating it to a cult status. Many later films have been inspired by *Sholay* and many have made multifarious references to it within its narrative.

Eco studies *Casablanca* from two frames—the common and the intertextual. By common frame he meant “data-structures for representing stereotyped situations like a sequence of actions which are more or less coded by our



normal competence. And by intertextual frames he meant stereotyped situations coming from the previous textual tradition and recorded in encyclopedia”(ibid. 5). Eco says that in a film we could distinguish between stereotyped intertextual frames and stereotyped iconographic image. Eco gives the example of a drunkard redeemed by love for the former and the references to Nazi malevolence for the latter. Even though the iconographical images present in a film do not refer to an action directly but suggest a possible development, according to Eco, it can be read as an intertextual reference (ibid. 5).

Adaption of literary texts is one of the most popular forms of film making that gives rise to intertextual reading of films. Writing about adaptation of literary texts into film, Mireia Aragay raises the issue of fidelity to the original text. According to her, fidelity is a critical point for evaluation of a film text. This has been replaced with the idea of “successful adaptation”. The ‘lapses of fidelity’ add to the success of adaptation, giving rise to new readings or rewritings of the original (2005: 20). Thomas Leitch traces the careers of three filmmakers, Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Walt Disney, and discusses the implications of the terms *adapter*, *metteur-en-scène* and *auteur* to suggest that these three adapters, unlike others, have become ‘auteurs’ since they have managed to turn their public persona into a trademark (Calvo 2007: 102).

Javier Pardo suggests that adaptation should be replaced by ‘cultural intertextuality’. In saying so, he gives the example of Kenneth Branagh’s *Frankenstein* (1994) which according to him is indebted to Francis Ford Coppola’s *Dracula* (1992). For Pardo adaptation is no longer a linear shift from text to film but film adaptations are intertextually dependent on previous films (2006: 239-240).

Intertextual relations also comprise of literary history or historical moment and the present time. Further the relations between the alluding text and the referent text are reciprocal and dialogical (Mihkelev 2004: 43). In her study of *Blade Runner*, María del Mar Asensio Aróstegui says that it is the perfect example of self-consciousness in intertextuality. Here is a film that employs the

early filmmaking traditions to its narrative. The protagonist, Roy is the son of the God, Dr Tyrell who is the God that created him but this time the son kills the God for the redemption of mankind. Its style is a mixture of many film genres with dominating presence of tenets of film noir and science fiction. By self-consciously foregrounding traditional strategies of representation, *Blade Runner* brings to the fore the 'constructedness of films through the omnipresence of eyes, screens and substitutes for cameras within the space of the narrative itself' (1994: 21).

One of the most popular and revered film directors of the present times, Quentin Tarantino is a master of intertextuality. The intertextual references in his films are subtle with only particular instances revealing the source of his reference. Tarantino leaves the delight and adventure of discovering these references to the audience. Tarantino has in fact been criticized on the ground that he 'recycles what has already been done' (Toth 2011: 15). Erik Toth writes about intertextuality and one of Tarantino's most admired films, *Pulp Fiction*:

*Pulp Fiction* flourishes with film references, it is filled up with pop cultural allusions, intertextuality leaks through every scene. The reason why he made such clear referencing is, on the one hand, his movie obsession and a desire to pay a tribute to cinema, which means everything for him. On the other hand, more importantly, Tarantino made *Pulp Fiction*, with the intention that anyone watching this movie could look for and recognize several allusions, connections, references – a practice which, for the pop-cultural audience, seems highly entertaining (ibid. 18).

Tarantino's life, experience, works and background has been a major influence in his movies. He has been an admirer of the B-movies and *Pulp Fiction* carries references to a lot of B-movies of his favourite director, Roger Corman (ibid). Intertextuality can also be a feature in the postmodern films. The postmodern films display multiple cinematic styles and narrative techniques that transcend the boundaries of time and space<sup>8</sup>. Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* with its referencing

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<sup>8</sup> There is articulate relation of space and time in classical cinema to create a realistic impression. Shots establish connection between the characters and the objects to create a subject for the spectator. Time maintains the chronology of shots and is contiguous to space (Hayward 2000: 343). Laura Mulvey has mentioned time as involving editing and narrative in a film and space as the changes in distance and editing within the frame (Mulvey 2009: 26).

and borrowing from other film text is an example of postmodern intertextuality at play in film text. The *Indiana Jones* film series is another instance where avid references are made to the earlier films in the series apart from mixing multiple genres (Woods 1999: 211).

Alfred Hitchcock, the master of thriller, has been one of the most quoted film directors of all times. And among all his immortal films, *Psycho* has perhaps grabbed attention of cinema lovers like none other. It has been remade, paid homage to, parodied and referred in many other forms in cinema circles all over. John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) mirrors Hitchcock's *Psycho*. As Constantine Verevis wrote '*Halloween* repeats a number of the conventions or "rules" of the genre pioneered by *Psycho*'. The character of Dr. Sam Loomis in *Halloween* is in fact named after *Psycho*'s female lead Marion Crane's lover. Carpenter even cast Janet Leigh's (*Psycho* star) daughter Jamie Lee Curtis for the role of Laurie Strode maintaining not only a connection to the original film text but also building some kind genetic link to it. On the other hand *Body Double*, *Dressed to Kill* and *Blow Out* pay homage to the classic thriller while *High Anxiety* and *Psycho Too* spoofs and parodies it to keep the intertextual thread alive (Verevis 2006: 20-21).

Writing about literary history and intertextuality, Anneli Mihkelev says that literary history or history in literature is away from reality; it is just a memory of reality or memory of history. This holds true for intertextuality as, she quotes Leon Burnett, 'intertextuality is a kind of bridge that link the unattainable past and the inescapable present (2004: 16)'. With a history of mixed cinematic traditions, film movements, previous auteurs films, and liberty to borrow from almost every aspect of culture including literature, cinema perhaps can be viewed as the largest playground for intertextuality. It is on this playground that films are made with individual insights and references to the past. The readers are free to read their meanings as the auteurs are free to create theirs. Charles Baudelaire's poem *The Swan* refers to ancient literature but the heroes in his poem are in a different environment. He bends the earlier tradition and re-reads them. Baudelaire's poem is inspired from Virgil's work. He interprets Virgil and plays with the text and ancient myths and creates new meaning out of it

(Cummings 2011). As we shall see in Chapter 4, Parama recites a few lines from a popular Bengali poet in the film, it is a conscious effort of the director to use the poem (that apparently was about the modern industrial towns) to relate to and reread it as an integral truth of Parama's existence.

### **3.3 Intertextuality and Indian cinema:**

The Indian cinema industry churns out record number of films each year and is in no way alien to the discourses and new dynamics of cinema. Be it movements like Italian neo-realism or New Wave, Indian filmmakers have incorporated and experimented with every new style of film making. Intertextual relations through adaptation, allusion, reference etc. have been a regular feature in Indian cinema. In addition to the rich tradition of culture, literature, art and folklore, Indian cinema has made extensive use of its two largest epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in narrating its stories. References to the epic in cinema consist of elements like character names, expressions in dialogues with other visual signs including pictures, and figurines (Tieber 2012: 18).

Indian cinema has portrayed the world around it sometimes realistically and sometimes in a fictional environment. To understand Indian cinema it is imperative to have an understanding of the Indian values, tradition, mythology, history and the larger cultural contexts (Singh 2009: 28-54). The background gives the base to the cinematic text. Cinema in India also represents a continuation of the various pre-cinema dramatic forms and stories, as well as various other forms of storytelling with their songs, dances, jokes etc. (Booth 1995: 172). Epic content in Indian cinema works to augment and give additional dimensions to the plot and characters. A character named 'Ram' constantly reminds the audience of the epic character and employs its attributes in reading a character on the screen. In the 1993 film *Khalnayak*, the hero, named Ram is described to be 'like the real Ram' by another character who then sits near his feet reminding the audience of the familiar image from the *Ramayana* where Hanuman sits near the feet of Lord Ram (ibid. 174). There is a tradition of depiction of Ram like characters in Indian cinema. Hindi cinema has epitomized the characteristics of the protagonist named Ram as seen in films like *Ram Aur*

*Shayam* (1967), *Ram Lakhan* (1989), *Main Hoon Naa* (2004). Similarly, the love stories resonate with the divine and the legendary tales of Radha-Krishna or Laila Majnu. Cinema in India often revolves around the many traditional myths and folktales. These stories form the basis of the film narration and many a times these themes are also incorporated into contemporary narratives (Handoo 1996: 137-138).

Reflecting on the exercise of intertextuality in the 2007 Hindi film *Om Shanti Om*, Sudha Shastri writes, “[T]he Bollywood Hindi film *Om Shanti Om* (2007) constructs its intertextual identity and debuts in the best postmodern fashion, with irony, parody, pastiche, irreverence, and double entendre of the tongue-in-cheek variety.” *Om Shanti Om*’s intertextual references consist of names of actors/films, quotation of previous films and film plots, earlier film music etc. The success of intertextuality in *Om Shanti Om* is that the reader or the spectator is aware of its intertextual nature and is actively involved in the discovery of meaning. The ability of the film to look into its own territory of the Hindi film industry of Mumbai marks a new milestone of self reflexivity and intertextuality in the context of Indian cinema. The *Om Shanti Om* narrative effortlessly steps in and out of the diegetic boundaries to create intertextual relationship; the introduction of the film director Farah Khan is an instance of such overstepping of diegetic boundaries.

Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* takes Austen’s classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice* and turns it into a modern drama with an intertextual approach. Although an international production, *Bride and Prejudice* reflects strong tones of a typical Mumbai Hindi film. The film is in fact replete with references to films of Manoj Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Yash Chopra and Karan Johar in an attempt by Chadha to pay homage to these legendary and popular filmmakers in Indian cinema (Mathur 2007). Chadha’s choice of a ‘Bollywood *masala*’ style film for a classic English novel, aimed at audiences in the United Kingdom, United States and India makes the whole process of making *Bride and Prejudice* an intertextual exercise.

Indian cinema in the recent times has made conscious efforts to weave an intertextual milieu around its films. While Farah Khan has built her narration with intertextual references to the industry that she is being born and bred into, Vishal Bharadwaj has mastered the art of adaption to create his film texts. Bhardwaj turned Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into *Maqbool* (2003) and *Othello* into *Omkara* (2006) to blend them into the Indian tune. Here is classic Elizabethan literature serving the palate of the Indian audience. Unlike Bhardwaj, Tigmangshu Dhulia takes one of Guru Dutta's *Sahib Biwi aur Ghulam* (1962) and gives it a modern deconstructed rendering in his *Sahib, Biwi aur Gangster* (2011). In the changed times, it is not the decaying *zamindar* family that gets the screen space, but a bold race of politics and power. The characters and the story seem to remind us of Guru Dutt but do not shy away from the present scenario of complex familial and social equations.

### **3.4 Intertextuality and feminism:**

Male writers like Harold Bloom believe that there is one singular and inescapable canon of literature and that this is what causes the anxiety of influence (Bloom 1997). However such unilateral descriptions of the literary canon evade the fact that women writers have traditionally been excluded from it. The gynocritical approach provides at least an implicit notion of intertextual relations between women writers. Elaine Showalter says gynocriticism is:

[T]he feminist study of women's writing including readings of women's texts and analyses of the intertextual relations both between women writers (a female literary traditions), and between women and men. (1990: 189).

Showalter calls upon critics to find various imageries, metaphors, themes and plots to trace the connections of women's writing through different time period as well as geographical boundaries to form a unified and intertextually rich tradition similar to that of the conventionally accepted male literary norms. Gilbert and Gubar analyses 19<sup>th</sup> century women novelists and states that there is a distinct female literary tradition to be found. The female writer does not suffer from the 'anxiety of influence'; it is the 'anxiety of authorship' within a male literary tradition (Grossman 2011). In a social system where women's

place in literature is marginal and they are even excluded from formal education, the woman writer's concern is to depict those culturally subjugated images of their brethren. In the standardized canon she is denied any academic and artistic attainment and are bound to either the images of an 'angel' or a 'dangerous other'. It is thus the job of female writers is to produce writing that is appropriate to their bodies (Allen 2000: 142).

The notion of intertextuality, with its connotations of webs and weaving, constitutes an opportunity for such feminization of the symbolics in the act of writing. Recurrent themes, images and figures—notably that of madness—mark an attempt to articulate distinctly female experience and produce a resistance to the dominant constructions of femininity (as seen in *Parama* and other films—other experiences). Gilbert and Gubar argue that in place of Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' women writers suffer from 'anxiety of authorship' (Grossman 2011). The desire, rather than anxiety concerning a precursor or tradition for women writers make influence or intertextuality, when established, a matter of legitimization rather than of emasculating belatedness.

The son of my fathers, today's male writers feels hopelessly belated; the daughter of too few mothers, today's female writers feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively arriving. (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 50).

Barthes suggested that the connection of a text to the 'cultural text' can be never pointed out with certainty because the reader of the text will 'write' or form his own intertextual references (Allen 2000: 143). This clearly allows space for gender and how we read within the theory of intertextuality. The female writes thus must create her own writing tradition distinct from that of the male writing traditions.

Monika Kaup opines that intertextual relations in women's writing must be traced across the vast cultural space of philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychiatry and literature which she terms as mad intertextuality. This opens the reader, according to her, to multiple points of entrance and exit while reading the text and it is at the discretion of the reader to choose from these points of entry or exit (Allen 2000: 149).

Nancy Miller argues that it has to be taken into account whether a text is written by a women or men. She asserts that the 'female signature' is essential and the poststructural intertextual notion of rejection of authorship poses a threat to the effacement of the women authors/auteurs (whose recognition is due). She argues that the women writer's relation to language, literary tradition and social production and reception of texts is historically different from that of men (ibid. 154). She writes:

The postmodernist decision that the author is dead and the subject along with him does not....necessarily hold good for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* Self, Ego, Cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentered, 'disorganised', deinstitutionalised, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from the universal position. (Miller 1988: 106, as quoted in Allen 2000).

Miller's position is gynocritical that transcends the notions of post structural theory that does not emphasize on the knowledge of the writer or the reader of the text. The gynocritical theorists however believe that the acts of reading and writing are influenced by the gender experiences of the writer and the reader (ibid. 155-156). Miller points to the myths of Arachne and Ariadne to illustrate that intertextuality has understated the struggle of women to be recognized within the text. She uses the myths of Arachne and Ariadne to illustrate how the former is a picture of a female artist who wins in a competition against a 'phallic mother' while the latter is the example of assistance to men. When gender ceases to be a thing of concern, there is a possibility of stereotyping women into the images of Ariadne. When gender becomes a definite selection in intertextuality, deviant images of the women (like Arachne) emerge. Miller opines that Barthes's idea of every everything being 'already read' and the absence of an author in intertextuality would hold no good to women writers as historically it has been the male authors who have had access to the already existent (ibid. 157-158). She writes:



[T]he latter project involves reading women's writing not 'as if already been read', but as if it has never been read; as if for the first time. (This assumption has the added advantage of being generally true.) (Miller 1988: 83, as quoted in Allen).

Miller does not advocate for the establishment of 'a God like author' but argues for a gendered recognition of the writer of the text. She also contends that intertextuality must move away from the indiscriminate assumption that the act of reading and writing are similar to all genders as the female writing tradition, is less accounted for (ibid. 159).

In "*Reading as a Woman: The Body in Practice*", Nancy Miller addresses the role of the material body in the act of writing and reading. Miller opines that most of the writing throughout history has been by men and that women have been 'eavesdropping' on this gamut of literary texts that were written for and by men. The women reader found herself and her experiences absent from such texts (1985: 292). She writes:

To reread as a woman is at least to imagine the lady's place; to imagine while reading the place of a woman's body; to read reminded that her identity is also re-membered in stories of the body. (ibid. 292).

She takes up instances of a few writings through ages to establish how men have developed texts through their own experiences; added humour and meanings. According her, the difference in sex may not only influence the making of meaning but also its reading (Miller, 1985: 294-295).

[S]exual difference can be said to structure the scene of production, the actual production of reading material, to the scene of reception, the reading of the letter, and the glossing of its text. (ibid. 295).

Miller said, the female identity is created by the 'interdigitated productions' of the pen and the phallus thus producing a representation that on one hand makes the woman the 'master's piece, masterpiece' and on the other the 'metaphorical disembodied' woman. Reading and writing (by men) thus, have positioned women as the objectified prop for a masculine self celebration. Miller maintains that male writers have been at advantage throughout history (1985: 297). However by analyzing a scene from Jane Austin's *Persuasion* she brings

forth the perspective of the woman author into the affairs of reading and writing;

The pen falls as Anne sets forth what we have come to call the sex/gender arrangements of our culture: the division of labor that grants men, among other things, the professions, and women, the private world of feelings. Here a woman figuratively picks up the pen, as Austen's heroine decorously but specifically protests against that troping of the spheres, against the penmanship of the hegemonic culture: "men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. The pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything." The "histories" from which one quotes to prove one's point were all, as Captain Harville is quick to grant, written by men. (ibid. 297).

The pen as the phallic symbol has been used to 'penetrate' their feelings through histories and thus build a one-sided image. When Anne in *Persuasion* puts the pen back to the hands of Captain Wentworth, Miller says, Austin does a 'powerful revision' of the earlier account of the phallic pen penetrating other's feeling. Instead here is man who wishes his feeling to be 'penetrated'. Thus, the body that plays in the building of the text is not limited to the parts. She instead refers to the feminine body and its experiences to through which stories are to be narrated; a body that would relate different tales (ibid. 297-298).

Cinema among many other pleasures, according to Laura Mulvey, also offers the pleasure of scopophilia. Cinema unfurls before its audience a series of fantastical images sealed with the mise-en-scene. The dark room and the bright screen inside the theatre produce a sense of separation and allows the audience to indulge in the spectacle. As cinema produces the glossed images it not only satisfies the pleasure of looking but also the pleasure of being looked at. In the patriarchal discourse woman thus become the image while man is the bearer of the look. The narrative and spectacle become one in cinema as the woman is woven into the narrative. She is thus the erotic object not only for the spectator but also for the characters within the screen. The image of the women as a spectacle in cinema is produced by the various cinematic techniques like editing, camera movement, narrative integrity and use of lights. Mulvey says it is important to break the conventional relation of the cinematic and formal elements to challenge the voyeuristic pleasures that cinema produce (2009: 16-26).

It is now a job left to the women filmmakers to do away with the phallogentric representation of women and write new histories in cinema. And in creating new narrative, strategies and images of representation, emerge new auteurs in the realm of cinema. Geetha Ramanathan studies Jeanine Meerapfel's *Malou* (1980), Marleen Gorris's *Antonia's Line* (1995), Prema Karanth's *Phaniyamma* (1981) and Leontine Sagan's *Madchen in Uniform* (1931) and says that they are far from bearing any similarity to the patriarchal canon of film narrative (2006: 9). Women would thus venture into the existing dominion of cinema and produce deviant narratives within the dominant discourse coloured by patriarchy. As Elaine Showalter opines that no form of writing and criticism can escape the prevailing discourse and be away from the contact of the tenets of patriarchy. Women's writing, according to her is a 'double voiced discourse' that represent the 'socio-literal and cultural heritage' not only of the subdued but also of the prevalent (1981: 201). Graham Allen while describing Showalter's observation on double voiced discourse writes:

A recognition of the dialogic, double voiced nature of discourse, allows Showalter and other feminists to cease in the exploration of a wholly 'other' tradition of writing, and to begin exploring the manner in which the writing of women, along with other marginalized groups, is always a mixture of available discursive possibilities. (2000: 160).

Graham Allen writes that the wish to resist the wiping out of the poststructuralist author (while not advocating for a God like author) may be realized by returning to Bakhtin. While he acknowledges the fact that Bakhtin cannot be claimed to be a feminist theorist, his idea 'of carnivalesque, of heteroglossia, of double voiced discourse and of the dialogic as opposed to the monological principle within language' would help the 'other' express them (ibid. 161). Allen cites the example of Dale M Bauer's consideration of the novels by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin in explaining the use of Bakhtinian notions as empowering for women writers and readers. He describes how the characters in these novels learn to see themselves and the process of their own social construction through the language of others (ibid.).

Such female characters, finding their own identities constructed by the language of others, can be linked to the feminist reader. Both female character and the feminist reader question the monological discourse dominant in the society and articulated by specific characters, and thus move from a position Showalter calls 'mutedness' to an exposure of resistant, un-official, alternative discourses and subject position. (ibid 161).

The self is thus produced as discourse of the 'other' which also exhibits its dialogical nature. Thus, it becomes important 'to interpret the discourses and discursive structures' that has been deemed unquestionable by those in the stations of authority (ibid. 161).

Patricia S Yaeger studies the intertextual connections between Eudora Welty's story collection *The Golden Apples* to Yeats's poetry. It is in fact the job of the woman writer to resist the unfamiliar setting (patriarchal discourse) and turn around the prevalent imagery to sketch the 'other' that she has been called (1984: 58). According to Yaeger, Welty views Yeats's language as representing the "otherness" and uses the same language to appropriate her own standpoint (ibid. 959). In Yeats's poem, the girl becomes the metaphor for the bounty of the landscape and is integrated into the masculine imagery. Welty makes use of this imagery to set a ground for redefining the gender situations (ibid. 260). Yaeger maintains that Yeats's poetry loses its ground in Welty's prose and new readings emerge of the old text (ibid. 262). She writes,

Welty, then, incorporates Yeats's poetry into *The Golden Apples* in order to reveal the limitations of his mythology of gender while at the same time extending this mythology to include woman's imagination. She uses the energy generated by Yeats's expressive and traditional images to question the source of these images and to challenge the gender-specific nature of his themes (ibid. 269).

Welty's take on Yeats's poem reveals the duality of the female characters that are not only the social 'others' but also are the heroes of their stories. The duality of women's existence is also a result of their social positioning. Stressing on Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse, Allen refers to Homi Bhabha where the latter maintains that modern subjects exist 'in-between' such notions as nationality, race, class and gender (Allen 2000: 164-165). The dialogic nature of existence

thus reveals a tension between ‘languages and utterances’ which focuses not only on social division but also on the separate “discursive formations within an individual subject” (ibid.). The post-colonial writer’s utterances are thus ‘double-voiced’—their own as well as mired with otherness (ibid.).

Feminism in film theory strived to look into the ‘power arrangements and psycho-social’ mechanisms’ in the society. With various stereotypes playing on screen, early feminist film theory questioned about women’s representation in cinema (Stam 2000: 170-172). This fetishizing of the female form has always been a concern for the feminist film critics and writers. As Angela Carter has put it,

“In the celluloid brothel of cinema, where the merchandise may be eyed endlessly but never purchased, the tension between the beauty of women which is admirable, and the denial of sexuality which is the source of that beauty but is also immoral reaches a perfect impasse.” (Carter, 1978: 60; As quoted in Stam, 2000: 172).

Writing about the role of patriarchy in the celluloid narrative, Molly Haskell opined that ‘women’s picture’ builds a separate space for women in the world of cinema and recognizes the presence of women in the domain (Cook 2005: 77). Feminism in film also criticized the requisites of authorship that was applied to the kind of cinema dominated by men. Thus it was necessary to revisit the concepts of authorship from the female point of view to include the cinematic language, hierarchy of film making to the issues of spectatorship. While the early feminist film theory worked towards denouncing the negative images and emphasized on changing the existing power structure by content and structure, theorists like Laura Mulvey, Pam Cook etc. moved away from the biological attributes of ‘sexual identity’ to the role of ‘gender’ that is a social construct shaped by various cultural and historical accounts. Thus the focus shifted from the image to ‘role of voyeur, fetishism and narcissism in the construction of a masculinist view of women’ (Stam 2000: 172-173). Claire Johnston expanded the feminist intervention and said that women as herself is conspicuously absent from cinema. She is a mere spectacle in the vast narrative screen (Butler 2002: 5). Johnston advocated that women’s cinema must learn from the success of Hollywood and she called for the release of the collective fantasies through

the entertainment films. Hollywood's widespread use of stereotypes provides a ground for the exercise of subversive strategies (ibid. 2002: 10). Mulvey in her seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* has analyzed the role of voyeur and scopophilia in creation of the image of the women in film narrative. According to Mulvey, cinema symbolizes and fulfills both the two types of scopophilic pleasures—one involving looking at others and the other, narcissism. Women then become the object in the narrative as well the spectacle of cinema. Mulvey thus calls for an 'alternative cinema' that which is different in 'both political and aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of mainstream cinema' (2009: 15-19).

### **3.5 Cinema and society in the films of Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Manju Borah:**

Films through its ingenious narratives and cinematography has been a medium of documentation of history and myth as well as of various cultural artifacts. It has discussed and mirrored the social realities and attempted at interpretations of the same. Even when entertainment has been the key appeal used by cinema, it has not restrained itself from conveying various socio-political ideas (Sulaiman 1988: 21-22). Film and filmmakers have at times been appreciated for their interpretation of a perceived reality and at times have been criticized. The filmmaker chooses to give new interpretation to an earlier known fact based on her experiences.

The films of Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Manju Borah undoubtedly revolve around various social issues with women being at the centre of the narrative. Their films are a reflection of various societal discrepancies that exist in the name of gender, caste, class, religion or others. They do not shy away from pointing out the nexus between these various exploitative mechanisms. These aspects of the society that have been the themes of their films have been highlighted by evolving a discourse to give voice to the weak and the oppressed.

The films of these directors, some adaptations and others scripted by them are unlike the regular Bollywood entertainers. The notion of intertextuality gives an explanation of how texts are constructed and decoded depending on the cultural

contexts in which they are embedded (Nehyba 2010: 13). Even with a disclaimer that the story is set in a fictional location, its resemblance to the surrounding cannot be missed. Their primary text of inspiration is the environment around them. They draw their plots and characters from the society and environment that is around them and provoke the mind to ponder and rebel against those norms that have been accepted with minimum resistance.

**Gender:** The role of women in cinema in India has generally been that of ornamental entities. In films where they seemed to have significant roles, they are mostly the victims or sacrificial heroine and each decade presented new brands of women in cinema who were all painted, more or less, in the same colour (Irani 2010). Feminist concern has always been one of the most important aspects of the films of Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Manju Borah. Women occupy the central space in the narratives and screen space of their films. They reflect critically on the dominant social positions and on issues of gender. Feminism opens the way for a radical, complex perspective in deciphering the hidden edifice of ideology operating within texts in the cultural contexts. When adapted to the celluloid they need to be examined and reexamined so as to show how the filmmaker has articulated his/her point of view (Singh 2009: 28-54).

Aparna Sen's films have dealt with various social themes and in these women always occupy a place of prominence. In *Paramitar Ek Din*, she depicts the relationship of two women—the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. Both caught in unhappy marriages, they find solace and companionship in each other. *Parama* explores the life and existence of women wedged in the domesticities. The film is a journey where the protagonist recognizes her freedom and embraces it. *Mr and Mrs Iyer* deals with the idea of religious divisions in the society. Here, two young people overcome their fear and prejudices to embrace love and affection. *15 Park Avenue* explores the relationship of two sisters, one of whom is affected by schizophrenia. The film also tries to delve deep into the various implications—social and personal, that patients with mental health condition have to cope with. In *The Japanese Wife*, Sen chronicles the love story

of two people kept apart by geographical boundaries. It reflects on the undying love that is shared between Miyagi and Snehamoy despite the distances between them. *Iti Mrinalini* on the other hand, chronicles the life of an aging film actor. Mrinalini's life is traced through the various career and personal choices that she had made. *36 Chowringhee Lane* depicts the story of an aging Anglo-Indian woman living alone in Calcutta.

*Paramitar Ek Din*, *15 Park Avenue*, *Iti Mrinalini* and *36 Chowringhee Lane* depict women who are free and independent. They are in the position to take a decisive role in their lives and are distant from the patriarchy that would subdue their voices. Though situations and circumstances tend to test their resilience, these women break all stereotypes to emerge strong and independent. In *Parama* the woman sheds her given roles to self-discovery. *Parama's* de-glamourized look in the end is a denial of the prospect of being the object of desire. She steps over the shadow of her husband, family and her lover to discover the individual in her. In *Sati*, the vulnerable position of women in the society is being presented by the mute girl Umi. Her condition may be equated with that of Sanichari in *Rudaali* whose societal marginalization leads to her exploitation. Umi's death on a stormy night under the tree to which she was married mocks the society that tied her fate to it. *Goynar Baksho* on the other hand, chronicles the life of three women of three generations. As time changes, the position of these women also change. While Rashmoni is an embittered widow trapped in traditions, Shomlata though docile in appearance, has a strong disposition. Shomlata's daughter is the woman who has tasted freedom of a new age and is a revolutionary in mind and attitude. Though Meenakshi in *Mr and Mrs Iyer* is a traditional Tamil Brahmin woman, she is resilient enough to come to the defense of her co-passenger who is a Muslim.

Kalpana Lajmi in her first film *Ek Pal* (1986) deals with the theme of extramarital relationships. *Rudaali* (1993), Lajmi's adaptation of Mahashweta Devi's short story, is a poignant tale of the women rebelling against the unjust social hierarchies using the very practice that has traditionally marginalized them to subvert it. *Daman* (2001) caught the attention of cinema lovers for its plot based on marital violence and marital rape. *Chingaari* (2006) is about the



social system where the impoverished section of society is exploited in the name of religion and tradition. The film questions the social system that allows trades like prostitution to grow but do not grant its practitioners rights and privileges in the name of religion and tradition. In *Darmiyaan* (1997) the director has opened a debate about the transgender people and their place in the society. Unlike the other women related issues which culminate in a climax leading to the emergence of a strong female, *Darmiyaan* fails to come to any conclusion on the subject. *Kyon?* (2003) on the other hand, builds its plot based on the various concerns of the youth.

In *Rudaali*, *Daman* and *Chingaari* the women are directly affected by the prevalent social systems. In *Rudaali* her class and caste identity becomes the cause of her suffering. Born into an impoverished class, life is nothing but a struggle. When rising above her assigned roles becomes impossible, turning the system to her advantage is the only way out. Thus, Sanichari becomes a *rudaali*, weeping fake tears at the death of the wealthy men and making her living through it. *Daman* and *Chingaari* play on the duplicity of society in treating the females. In Indian culture Goddess Durga is the source of strength and power and protector of the weak. Her image is that of an unyielding and unattainable force, yet gracious and loving to the devotees who surrender themselves to her worship (Tiwari and Tiwari 2009: 28-32). When the female form as a God is revered and hold in awe, the same image in the mortal frame becomes the object of oppression. The protagonists in both the films are named after the Goddess of strength and power— Durga in *Daman* and Basanti in *Chingaari*. While Durga suffers in the institution of marriage, Basanti is a prostitute whose services are sought by the most powerful men of her village. Durga and Basanti lead lives of deprivation and fear until they decide to don the image of the Goddess and conquer their oppressor. In *Daman* and *Chingaari* there is a constant display of the social dichotomy in treating different forms of the female body. Durga and Basanti have no saviors to rescue them. In a final battle they assume the persona of the Goddess and overcome the perpetrator of their affliction. The Goddess whose power is sought by praying to the idols comes to live through these women, perhaps delivering a message that we are our own

Gods, the strength and power to speak up lies within us. These protagonists of Lajmi carve out their own future; they shape their fate.

In dealing with various issues of gender, Kalpana Lajmi does not fall into the trap of the binaries. In *Darmiyaan* the concerns of the transgender community and their existence in the crossroads of the accepted gender norms are pondered upon. *Darmiyaan* depicts Immi's constant battle to come to terms with his gender. He is haunted by the question of his gender identity as a child as well as an adult. But unlike other protagonists of Lajmi, Immi does not emerge victorious in the battle with his surroundings and finds solace in death. He embraces death simultaneously with his mother who had disguised their relationship during her life time.

The issues of gender play a dominant part in the film narratives of Manju Borah. From her presence in the home and family to her role in the affairs of the power, Borah has added different perspectives to the position that a woman holds. In *Akashitorar Kothare*, the protagonist rebels against the chauvinism of her husband. She cannot accept the definition of a woman limited to a few titles within the household and tries desperately to resurrect her crushed identity. *Laaz* is the battle of a young girl against the forces of fate and poverty. In *Joymati*, the director has made an effort to define the role of the Ahom princess as a figure that shaped the history of the Ahom kingdom. She is much more than just a 'sati' (a sacrificing woman) but a statesman who helped define the course of the state of affairs. The outspoken and valiant picture of *Joymati* is a deviance from the image of the 'sati'. In protecting the whereabouts of her husband from the young king and his men, she ensured the emergence of a strong kingdom. Amidst the powerful nobles it is the story of the resilience of a lone woman that holds strong.

**Motherhood:** The mother child relationship is another subtheme that dominates Lajmi's films. The mother in the films is pre-oedipal. The child is the source of joy for her. The father is almost non-existent. Through the child she experiences selfless love. It is the child that takes her close to nature. When it comes to the child she is not bound by the roles that her environment has

decided for her. She takes care of the child, provides for and protects it. The absence of the father in the films indicates that the child solely belongs to her. She feels threatened when the child is threatened. Sanichari does all she can to prevent her son from being bonded as a labourer at the landlord's place. Durga and Basanti stop at nothing but death when their children are threatened. For Zeenat, it has been a lifelong battle to stand by her transgender son. Though her relationship with Immi is disguised, her protective instincts for him cannot be missed. The motherhood that is celebrated by Lajmi is the one that Kristeva says makes us speaking beings, the passion that makes us human rather than animals. Maternal passion, according to Kristeva is a prototype of all human passion. It is in motherhood that the link to the other can become love (Oliver 2010: 1-2).

In Aparna Sen we discover many shades of motherhood. Paramita in *Paramitar Ek Din* loses her child to cerebral palsy. She joins a spastic school for such kids in the memory of her child and showers her love and affection on those children. Parama's domestic conflict does not come in the way of her love for her children. She is in fact a nurturer and adores her two children. Meenakshi is a mother of a little baby when introduced in the film. It is perhaps her protective instincts that prompt her to come for Raja's rescue. Mrinalini's world is turned upside down at the death of her daughter. While Aparna Sen celebrates the pre-Oedipal mother in most of her films, *Yugant* depicts a different side of the female where she rejects motherhood to follow her dreams. Here is a deviation from the early feminist movement when motherhood was perceived as a restricting criterion to the woman's achievements and goals.

Like Lajmi and Sen, Manju Borah too deals with the issues of motherhood in her films. *Aai Kot Nai* on the other hand, in a very subtle way, celebrates the love of a mother. While people in two neighbouring villages fight for land and power, it is love that triumphs in the end. Despite the feud and anger raging between the people of the two villages, one woman chooses to nurture the baby of another as it is separated from its mother. It is the compassion of a mother that triumphs amidst the prevailing hatred. Joymati too is a mother and her resistance to the royal forces because of her concern for the future of her children. Her sacrifice is

not just aimed at protecting her husband from the rage of the throne but also to secure the coming days. In *Aai Kot Nai* and *Joymati*, the image of the mother extends beyond the individual to include the community. The mothers here are like mother earth taking care of all her children without prejudice and exceptions.

**Socio-cultural politics:** Concerned with the issues of her gender, Aparna Sen weaves her narratives with various socio-cultural realities and strives to subvert the dominant ways of looking at the female. Her concerns about health related taboos in the society are visible in her films *Paramitar Ek Din* and *15 Park Avenue*. Here is a constant endeavour to rise above prejudices and intolerance and analyze things from various perspectives and approaches. Mithi's schizophrenia is not a limiting factor, instead in a surreal ending she finds the solace that she has been looking for. Paramita's devotion for the spastic children is an attempt to garner social acceptance for these hapless ones. *Sati* is a critical narrative of the impoverished existence of a young woman whose situation aggravates because of her physical disabilities. *When Mr and Mrs Iyer* chronicles human bonding and empathy amidst communal divide in the society, *36 Chowringhee Lane* looks into life of an old Anglo-Indian woman living almost as an outcaste. *Mrinalini* on the other hand, is a challenge to every norm in the society. She becomes an unwed mother, gets into a relationship with a younger man and lives life on her own to claim professional success. *Goynar Baksho* on the other hand, narrates the tale of changing times and the woman's changing status. *Parama* challenges the concept of womanhood and her identity as perceived by those around her. Here the protagonist emerges from a life defined by the societal and familial dictates to find her self. *Yugant* and *Japanese Wife* broods over the complications of life and its impact on the individuals. Deepak, Anushuya, Snehamoy and Miyage are all entangled in the knots of situations and circumstances where the individuals and their aspirations are lost.

The plots of Kalpana Lajmi's films are woven around the socio-cultural realities. The film narrative builds a critical discourse around the social system and the place of the subaltern in it. In *Rudaali*, Sanichari is the subaltern not only

because of her gender identity but also her class and caste identities. But Sanichari learns to subvert the aversions to her benefit and emerge victorious in the same system that has exploited her and ensured a life of a destitute for her. Class struggle forms the basis of *Rudaali*. *Daman* is all about the unequal relationship between the partners in the institution of marriage. Traditions have taught the woman to place her man in a pedestal equal to God. *Daman* explores the horrors when the pedestal becomes the source of exploitation. The filmmaker here gives the decisive power to the woman who refuses to be subjugated in the power relation. She assumes the persona of the Goddess and goes on to build the narrative for her future. In *Daman* too, the concern of class is reflected. Durga is from a poor family married to an ill-tempered man whose mother assumes that being born to poverty she would naturally have the fortitude to bear with the anguish that the marriage might bring. The class division becomes a license for Sanjay to exploit the girl from the tea gardens. Momentary pleasure is all that he aspires from her and refuses to accept her after she bears his child. In *Chingaari*, the nexus of social exploitation is headed by the temple and its priest. It is not only the woman who bears the brunt of Bhuwan Panda's unrestrained power but the villagers too are coerced into accepting his authority. He is aided in his oppressive regime by the corrupt state machinery (the police) and the moneyed man of the village. Once again the woman dons the garb of the Goddess to end the tyrannical reign.

In *Chingaari* the woman leads a rebellion from the front. She not only speaks for her gender but for her class as well; she speaks for the ones who have been suppressed, subjugated and mocked by traditions. *Darmiyaan* starts with a direct reference to the film industry in a self-reflexive style, commenting on the commercial agenda working to build standards about beauty and youth. Zeenat, the once popular film star, loses the battle of time and starts fading from the film industry. The picturisation of Zeenat in *Darmiyaan* is a direct reference to the Indian film industry especially Bollywood where older female actors start losing prominent or lead roles. It is very common to see an older male actor playing the lead opposite a much younger female. However a slightly older female lead cast opposite a younger male actor attracts criticism from all

corners- the press, industry and audiences of having lost their “youthful charm” (Ganti 2004: 114). This aspect of the film industry has been aptly captured by Lajmi in *Darmiyaan* where the producer disapproves of an older Zeenat romancing the younger hero. This standard of youth and characters have been adopted by the film industry has often been labeled as the demand of the audience who likes to see young women in the lead, who is appealing to the male lead and performs sensuous song and dance sequences. Patriarchal Indian society views young women as being sensuous and sexually appealing and older women as being less attractive. This is the male fantasy in operation which expects that the female lead has to be young and in her prime, while the male lead can be in his early fifties and yet pass for a young hero or protagonist in his late twenties and early thirties (Nandkumar 2011: 15-16).

While Zeenat tries to cope with the changing course of her professional life, its dual standards seem to seep into her life in owning and bringing up her transgender son. Immi’s gender identity is hidden from him as a child. Zeenat, in an unsteady mind, tries to reverse Immi’s childhood through the child that he had adopted. Towards the end of the film it is revealed that the ‘beautiful and glamorous heroine’ could never relate to the reality of giving birth to a transgender child. Immi’s act of cursing Champa, the leader of the *hijras*, and her subsequent break down not only reflects on their lives on the margins of society but also deep superstitions and myth making that surrounds this part of the population.

Manju Borah’s films are weaved around various socio-cultural realities. *Baibhab* is a tale of the various complications of life revolving around human vanity and self-indulgence. It is a story of conflict between the spiritual wealth of the son set against the material wealth of his father. This father-son conflict is in fact a reflection of the ever spawning struggle between the quest of the spirit and the body. While narrating the tale of the Ahom princess, Joymati, Manju Borah weaves the picture of the socio-political scenario of the state of Assam during that period of the time. The kingdom was run by a young King when Joymati’s resilience and sacrifice gave hope for a new political regime and a new direction for the kingdom to move on. On the other hand, in *Akashitorar Kothare*, while

narrating the story of the protagonist, the script also looks at the various facets of life influenced by consumerism and materialism. *Laaz* dwells on the society's inability to address the basic human needs. A little girl is trapped in the webs of poverty to give up her education. This is an eerie social reality reflected on screen. In *Aai Kot Nai*, the director gives a glimpse of the disparities as well as likeness that prevail among the people living in the border areas. Though the struggles have various political and economic reasons, the film narrates the universal feelings of loss, pain and love. Though *Anya Ek Yatra* reflects commercial style of film making, the plot revolves around a young man losing his way to anger and revenge, and the extremists feeding on the vulnerability of a livid youth.

Majority of films, mostly commercial, tend to preserve the laid down rules and traditions. Commercial cinema has absorbed many of the themes and textual conventions of traditional drama, utilizing them as a structural and thematic basis. It also shares with its epic and traditional predecessors an inclination for emotional variety and stereotyped characters (Booth 1995: 186). But filmmakers like Kalpana Lajmi, Aparna Sen and Manju Borah try to create a new narrative in their films that undoubtedly share their stories with the already told ones. The success of these filmmakers lies in their ability to subvert a prevalent system of thought and belief. Myth, folklore, history or literature gives them the basis of their stories but they do not dictate the finale. Their text is a culmination of not only the already prevalent narratives and discourses but an experience that they have lived. They are not God like authors but definitely the auteurs for whom the celluloid becomes the canvass of expression.

### **3.6 Intertextual reading of the selected films:**

Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Manju Borah make use of various available texts and discourses to build up the narrative of their films. While referring to the earlier texts, they also try to build counter-narratives that challenge the popular readings. Their films generate multiple meanings and allow for the emergence of fresh perspectives. They do not take the 'already said' in the face value but come up with reinterpretations that provide a counter argument to the

prevalent ideas. Cinema thus becomes a platform where diverse views emerge and diverse meanings are generated.

In *36 Chowringhee Lane*, as Aparna Sen narrates the story of an aging Anglo-Indian English teacher in post-independent West Bengal, she makes clever allusions to Shakespeare to add volume to the character of Violet. Violet names her cat Sir Toby, in all likelihood after Sir Toby Belch from the Shakespearean comedy *The Twelfth Night*. Lines from the same play are repeated by the students in Violet's school where she teaches. Sir Toby conceivably reminds of the flamboyant Shakespearean character and also may be read to bear a resemblance to carefree life of Nandini and Samaresh while ironically Sir Toby's owner (here the cat) lives an apparently mundane life. As Olivia mourns in *The Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby spends time in celebration and drinking, revealing the traits of a merry maker with love for a frivolous life free of remorse (Markham 2010). Violet's lonely life can be put in direct contrast to that of Nandini and Samaresh who are an easygoing couple with little regards for her generosity.

Literary adaptation also forms the background for her 2013 film *Goynar Baksho*. The film is based on the on a novel of the same name by noted Bengali writer Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay. As is revealed by Aparna Sen in the pre-release function of the film, she had read the novel in 1993 and almost immediately decided to make it into a film. She was particularly fascinated by the socio-economic status of women as described in the novel and the changes that have followed in each subsequent generation. Sen very lucidly describes the character of Rashmoni, who has lived as a widow throughout her adult life (Sen 2012). The older Rashmoni has seen the changes in time and gathered worldly wisdom through her experiences and deprivation. She not only encourages Shomlata to be independent but also to have an affair with a suitor in the absence of her much older husband. Rashmoni has always led a life of deprivation—her long hair was cut to match the widow's garb, her desires pushed to the corners and even her appetite was restricted to bland vegetarian food. Her only possession was the box of jewelry that has served not only as a silent companion but also helped her spend the days in dignity.



In *Iti Mrinalini*, Sen narrates the tale of a popular actor Mrinalini through a non-linear narrative. The film moves between past and present to portray Mrinalini's life to the audience. An aging Mrinalini is down in the dumps because of her failure to play the role of Nandini from Tagore's play *Rakta Karabi*. In the world of glamour driven by financial aims, Mrinalini wishes to be Nandini – the one who transgresses the material boundaries to establish love. In positioning Mrinalini in the dilemmas of her relationships Sen borrows symbolism from the film industry. As Siddhartha Sarkar chides a young Mrinalini a picture of Marilyn Monroe hangs next to her, who has been the epitome of the 'innocent' female beauty in the patriarchal society with a soft voice and vulnerable sexuality. Mrinalini exudes an almost childlike semblance as she listens to Siddhartha Sarkar. The façade for her relationship with Siddhartha stands out for the audience in the portrait of Charlie Chaplin. Charlie Chaplin's screen persona points to the comic nature of things and their dual persona; in this case Siddhartha is a married man who is involved with Mrinalini but would never give a legitimate status to their relationship. The awards, applauses, rivalries and glossy magazine gossips form a part of the narrative strategy in depicting the strenuous nature of the industry that Mrinalini is a part of. Aparna Sen also pays endearing homage to the late Satyajit Ray in her film. Film as an art and the yearning of an artist to work with the very best is told through Mrinalini's admiration for Ray and her subsequent feeling of void that the death of the director created.

While *Iti Mrinalini* uses symbolism and references from contemporary texts and contexts, *Parama* refers to Indian mythology and religious tradition to bring out the contradictions in women's social status. When heads bow down to the divine form, the mortal image of the same is subject to judgments and approvals in her daily existence. However, the image of Durga with her ten hands may also be read as the metaphor of multiple roles and expectations that a woman is expected to play. It is by the measure of the number of roles that she plays and the efficiency quotient that her value is counted. Thus, it is important for Parama to be a 'good' wife, mother and daughter-in-law to be acknowledged for.

Her individual identity would only be a part of the multifarious roles that she plays.

Kalpana Lajmi too takes to Indian mythology to give critical magnitude to the character of the protagonist in the film *Daman*. *Daman* makes an attempt to bring the horrors of marital violence into the screen of Indian cinema. Marital rape is not addressed by the law of the land but it is cause of concern for the filmmaker; the film is thus titled—*Daman: A Victim of Marital Rape*. It is both ironical and symbolic that the meek protagonist, who overcomes her fear to kill her authoritarian husband, is named after the goddess of strength and power, Durga. The goddess was created by the gods to rectify their mistakes and overpower the demon that they had created. Durga in the film is not a divine creation but born to poor parents. Her deprived socio-economic situation thus becomes the reason for her being married to Sanjay, a man of coarse temper. She would however rise above her situation to find courage, abandon her marital life and kill her husband as the last resort to save her daughter from a fate similar to what she had suffered. Durga's transformation in *Daman* is the result of the excesses of patriarchy much akin to the goddess after who she is named. The use of myth and religious beliefs continues in *Chingaari* which is an adaptation of Bhupen Hazarika's short story 'The Postman and The Prostitute'. Played as a love story between a prostitute and a postman, the film situates the story of Basanti, a sex worker in a remote Indian village. Her status in the society is decided not only by her trade but also class. As most in the village, she too reels under poverty. Basanti's life is positioned against Bhuwan Panda who is a high priest indulging in the worship of goddess Kali. While he pays obeisance to the goddess, innocent girls from the village are used for bizarre religious rituals. His visits to Basanti expose the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society in relation to the status of women. The duality of society is exposed when Bhuwan Panda equates Basanti with Draupadi, who had five husbands. When sexual promiscuity of men escapes judgment, a providential placement of women becomes the reference point for generations. Like *Daman*, here too the woman is placed in a comparative perspective with the goddess to reveal the

dichotomous existence of the female form. When provoked, however, she does not shy away from donning the garb of the fearsome goddess.

However, *Daman* and *Chingaari* present the extremities of female form as propounded by patriarchy. While in *Parama* the image of the goddess is used to express the dichotomy of female existence, the woman does not take on the goddess's garb to rise above her predicament. She chooses to remain human and take pride in her imperfections and frail form. Her strength comes from her inner ability to resist the external and live in her own self.

*Darmiyaan*, problematizes the gender binaries, by setting the story up against the backdrop of the Hindi film industry. Young Zeenat's successful career in the film industry is shown through the song and dance sequences that would remind the viewers of the Hindi film industry of the 1950s. The scene where Inder rescues her from fire is an obvious reference to the (in)famous incident (on the sets *Mother India*) of Nargis being rescued from fire by Sunil Dutt, leading to an ever quoted tale and romance between the two actors. Further a trend of the film industry to christen people with different industry names is delightfully depicted in the film when the producer mentions the screen name of an actor and Zeenat asks his 'real' name.

*Rudaali* is an adaptation of Mahashweta Devi's short story of the same name. Lajmi has rendered a feminist reading of the original story. Lajmi comes up with many twists in the characterization and the plot to talk about the socio-political marginalization of a woman influenced by her caste and class status. The woman (protagonist) in the film is not aided by any male character in the realization of her fate and the factors influencing it. She is capable to see through the shams and deceptions of the society that she lives in and exploit them for her own interest. The enlightenment of Sanichari comes from within (the woman), not from inspiration from an external source resulting in self-discovery.

Considering the intertextual nature of these films, one cannot miss the mix of medium in the works of the filmmakers. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin believe that new media depends and modifies old media to develop not only its

form but also its content, a process he termed remediation. Thus the language of media relies on preexisting texts to constantly develop and create something new (Bromley 2014: 3-4). Film as is known, borrows heavily from the earlier art forms to create its narrative structure. Manju Borah makes use of *bhaona* depicting passages from the Mahabharata. This serves as an essential reference point to man's insatiable hunger for power and political dominion. The saga of Mahabharata is replicated in the borders of Assam and Nagaland which is the plot of the film. It is a fight for land that has divided the two communities which have shared endearing tales of brotherhood between them. In the fight for expansion of geographical boundary and political power, basic human values are compromised. As the fight between brothers left the mothers in pain in the Mahabharata, same is their fate in the present times. The loss and pain suffered is depicted in the film through the yearnings of a young mother who loses her little son in the hostilities between the two communities. The baby is found safe and is nourished by another woman across the border. While man dwell in the fight for expansion and power woman is equated with Mother Nature, who, unmindful of the resentment, would choose to nourish.

In *Akashitorar Kothare*, Manju Borah makes a statement about the age old exploitation of women and their position in the backyards of the society. She exposes the hypocrisies of the 'modern educated' society when the protagonist, Akashitora suffers the same fate as the women she had researched about. These positioning of women in the material world of patriarchy is presented through various ritualistic performances in the film. The filmmaker again mixes various art forms with the film form to provide an intertextual reading of the condition of women in the patriarchal society.

However, Manju Borah as a feminist filmmaker comes to the fore with the rendering of the life of the Ahom brave heart, Joymati in celluloid. The legend of Joymati is a staple tale in every Assamese household and her life story served as the backdrop for the first Assamese film *Joymati* by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. Noted Assamese litterateur Lakshminath Bezbaruah immortalized her in his classic play *Joymati Konwari*. As Manju Borah's *Joymati* pays homages not only to the legend herself but also to the earlier film and play, she comes up with her

own reading of Joymati's life. Borah's Joymati is far from being only a *sati* (an all sacrificing woman). To her Joymati is a politically conscious and farsighted royal figure. Her Joymati marches fearlessly to the King to face her destiny for her denial to disclose her husband's whereabouts. The irony of her fate is when she suffers in the hand of the royal torturers Godapani (her husband) bonds with another woman. The wry smile on Joymati's face, captured in a close up, tells of her awareness of the irony of her situation. While her husband and their lineage will rule Assam for generations to come, it will be the memories that she will reign.

Intertextuality is a system that connects a text to its surrounding. It is an approach that focuses on how one text is related to the other (Hammouri et al 2013: 211). Writers often make use of intertextual references to drive home their ideas. Intertextual references are a political tool for the filmmakers and it allows them to cross the boundaries of 'cultural divisions' (Reader 1990: 11). The intertextual references in the films are not just to build the story but are used to make a stand point by not only refereeing to other films also borrowing heavily from literature. Adaptation becomes another intertextual tool for the filmmakers to drive home the various social messages. Film adaptation in the very basic term in the reproduction of an earlier text in the medium of cinema. However the assumption of rigid fidelity to the original text has been overrun by the concept of intertextuality. It thus provides the women filmmakers a scope to put forward their arguments without the necessity of maintaining an absolute loyalty to the earlier text. To quote Nina Menkes, cinema is a 'sorcery' that tries to construct a different reality while challenging the prevalent one. Women in their cinema contest not only the patriarchal images but also try to uncover women's experiences that not has been dealt by cinema earlier (Petrolle and Wexman 2005:1-5). Film adaptation disrupts the 'formal and cultural identity and shifts power' and can enable women to come up with and experimental reading of an existing text (Cobb 2015: 14). The filmmakers in their adapted texts thus have an already narrated story to play on, provide an improvised reading and create new imageries.

The filmmakers question the established belief and systems. They depict how expectations and reality differ and how the former, influenced by prejudiced notions, causes damages to individuality. They present to us the system of social hierarchy that has left a class of socially marginalized and built unequal gender relations. Among the marginalized, it is the women who suffer more as they are to perform not only within their class but also within the gender boundaries. An attempt at transgression would subject her to the edges of the society as was the case with Parama's aunt, who dared to cross the boundaries and was subjected to the confines of the interior of the house. These filmmakers however, take the medium of cinema to interrogate the uneven system of belief, pointing out the dichotomies and creating new narratives.