

Article

Debjani Halder

**Vanishing Pardah? Or Invisible Veil!**  
**Patriarchy Vs. Political Empowerment of Women**  
**A Cinematic Contemplation Theme: Gender and Political Rights**



*(Bandit Queen: 1994)*

Gender discrimination is an important cause that relegates the position of women in Indian Politics. It is a ground for denying rights and is not an argument posited in opposition to the notion of universal rights of women. In India, except for the ballot machine, women's participation as contestants, elected representatives, members of the Government, and so on was negligible. The nature of the problem is varied such as lack of time due to domestic responsibilities, socio-cultural norms limiting mobility, and patriarchal control discouraging women from coming into conflict with men. Patriarchy always indicates the ramparts between public and private for women. The inner-outer distinction specified that the world is external, the

domain of material, and the home represents the inner spiritual self. The world is typically treacherous terrain, pursuing material interests where practical consideration reigns supreme. It is also eventually the domain of the male. In the home, its essence remains unaffected by the profane activities of the material world. And the woman is its representation (though indirectly, it is controlled by men). It has been observed that identifying social roles by gender corresponds with separating the social space into 'Ghar and Bahir'. There are so many factors that, in turn, merely reiterate the real problems women have faced.

Often alternative films reflect our culture while simultaneously serving as an element that

constitutes it. In this current paper, the term ‘women empowerment’ will be explored in the context of the post-nineties Indian films, which will be explored how the terms political empowerment, power, or capacities are regulated in Indian democracy. Simultaneously I would like to explain how Indian filmmakers visualise the political subjugation of women through their cinematic gaze. Did they focus on the long battle of women to achieve political empowerment? Films like *Samsodhan* (1996), *God Mother* (1999), *Bandit Queen* (1994), *Satta* (2002), *Deol* (2004), *Gulaab Gang* (documentary) (2012), *Thalaivii* (2021), and *Panchayat* (2021) will be discussed from a distinct sense of representation, where the term ‘representation’ uses from two discourses i) Representation as ‘Speaking of’ as in terms of politics and ii) ‘Representation’ as in the art or the philosophy of filmmaking.

Patriarchy indicates a list of norms for women to restrict their mobility in the social sphere. Thus, their identities would be confined to the domestic sphere. Historically women have neglected their individualities which have been determined by male members such as father-husband-son. Such exclusions are based on essentialist assumptions about women. They are not deemed capable of exercising rights to self-determination or engaging the public democratic or political process of their inferiority to men. Nevertheless, in the mid of 1970s, the agenda of political empowerment of women focused on the term gender justice. Conceptually the term empowerment is a process that enables women to consider their access and control to material, intellectual and human resources. Empowerment is the redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. Nonetheless, it is still questionable whether political participation is essential to women's empowerment. Does their spontaneous participation lead them to be a decision-maker?

*“Meru: It’s impossible. How does Bhabi contest in the Panchayat election? She is illiterate, and her place is only at home. Before that, she had not even interacted with people or gone outside the rooms*

*without her Veil.*

*Lakhubhai: Don’t worry. You will take every responsibility after the election. Now we need her thumb impression. It is not necessary to discuss it with her. Women are worthless. Their proper place at the kitchen in front of Chula....” (God Mother: 1999)*

The above dialogue is taken from the film *Godmother* (1999), where the patriarchal and traditional discourse indicates that patriarchy constructs women as weak, biologically inferior, modest, and incapable of decision-making. Patriarchy becomes a historical category within the originating myth of male coercion. However, the strength of this position lies in the fact that it foregrounds patriarchal oppression as existing within all historically known modes of production and as a socio-cultural system cutting across class divisions. Traditionally the roles of women within the family are assumed to be natural-selfless and scared.<sup>1</sup> This film also visualised that patriarchy indicates ramparts between public and private for women. The inner-outer distinction specified that the world is external, the domain of material, and the home represents the inner spiritual self. The world is typically treacherous terrain for the pursuit of material interests where practical consideration reigns supreme. It is also eventually the domain of the male. In the home, its essence remains unaffected by the profane activities of the material world, and woman is its representation (though indirectly, it is controlled by men).

From Govind Nihalani’s *Samsodhan* (1996) to the recent web series *Panchayat* (2021), there are visualised that to control women’s sexuality, production, and reproduction, men control women’s mobility. The imposition of *Pardah*, restrictions on leaving domestic space, a strict separation of private and public limits on the interaction between the sexes, and so on all control women’s mobility and freedom. In the first part of the film, *Bandit Queen* (1994) and *Satta* (2002), the directors mention thus men control women, so women are treated as private property.). Simultaneously it also depicts that the identification of social roles indicates the separation of the social space into ‘*Ghar and Bahir*’. The film *Samsodhan*

(1996) depicts a relevant point that eventually, within the public /domestic dichotomy, there remains an ambiguity resulting directly from the patriarchal practices and theories of our past that have serious practical consequences- especially for women. Fundamental to this dichotomy from its theoretical beginnings has been the division of labour between the sexes. Men are assumed to be chiefly preoccupied with and responsible for the occupations in the sphere of economic and political life, and women with those of the private sphere of domesticity and reproduction. Women consider as 'by nature' both unsuited to the public realm and rightly dependent on men and subordinated within the family. These assumptions do not surprisingly have pervasive effects on structuring the dichotomy and its component spheres.

Historically the process of women's involvement in Indian politics was linked to the development of the Indian struggle for Independence. Nonetheless, it had the sanction of the national political hierarchy, including those forces ideologically committed to women's subordinate position on behalf of tradition. Political activist and only women politburo member of the CPIM party, Ms. Brinda Karat, explained in a personal interview that the issue of women's equality was accepted in a generalised way although subsumed by the broader goal of the nation's freedom. She added that the patriarchal values justified that, Indian women received political rights on a salver without any struggle because of the magnanimity or the special qualities of Indian male political leadership. In 1917 Soviet was the first country recognised to give women the unconditional right to vote. It impacted India and benefited Indian women in getting the right to vote without having to go through the kind of confrontation on this issue that women in the West faced. Yet the context of broad in the context of broad alliances formed at the time, the commitment by the political leadership to equal rights for women was never really tested. It was one thing to accept the right to vote for Indian women when that right was essential for strengthening the bigger struggle against British rule.

It was true that from the turn of the 20th century, nationalists refused to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. Moreover, they granted women voting rights without involving them in a suffrage movement. In other words, by containing the real history of the women's question within the middle-class home, the colonial (and post-colonial) public sphere has effectively degenerated. It has been observed that in the 20th-century political sphere, from a nationalist perspective, either women ceased to be relevant in the next phase of the nationalist struggle or women's political rights were resolved. During the colonial period, the British refused to grant women the right to vote and stand for elections on the same terms as men. By 1930 major women's organisations were also deliberating the question of reserved seats in political bodies apart from women's voting rights. At the All-India Women's Conference in Bombay, Sarojini Naidu unequivocally declared that women did not want preferential treatment based on women's inferiorities.<sup>2</sup>

In the Gandhian era of Indian politics, women's participation in the freedom struggle was prioritised. Still, he focused on the self-sacrifice image of women rather than highlighting their political entitlement. So, it could narrate that Gandhi's relationships with women were the conduit for turning demands for reservations or special electorates into a sign of anti-nationalist betrayal. And at the height of political nationalism, the public glorification of femininity became the ground for persuading women of the illegitimacy of their demands for special political representation. In the 1935 Act British, they refused to provide any declaration of fundamental rights or non-discrimination based on sex for holding public office. Some modifications were made regarding qualifications for voting in different provinces (wifehood remaining primary), which expanded male and female electorates to 43% and 9%, respectively. In the next election of 1937, 56 women candidates entered the legislatures, of which only ten came from general seats, and five were nominations. Women's

organisations, therefore, felt specifically betrayed by Congress. If it was Gandhi who had been the most vociferous advocate against reserved seats for women, the Congress now had little room for any women candidates other than those who were curtailed party workers, in any case. Eleven women were nominated to the Constituent Assembly to participate in its deliberations on the ultimate finalisation of the Constitution. According to the analysis of Vina Mazumder, it could say that the main doubt was the willing and spontaneous participation of women in the civil disobedience movement rather than the radical ideas of sexual equality between the sexes in the Congress party and later in the Constituent Assembly. (Mazumder: 1979).<sup>3</sup>

Recent web series, *Panchayat*, has depicted that policies followed by Governments in India after independence have not been conducive to the participation of women in public life.

When women have seen family careers to the exclusion of other roles, there is generally little help from male family members. When social stereotyping is backed by state negligence in providing any backup infrastructural facilities to help lessen the burden of domestic responsibility, it is tough for women to come into politics sustainably. Husbands supporting their wives in public or political work must go through 'Joru ka Gulam' syndrome, and such social comments often lead to withdrawal of support.

As Lotika Sarkar and Vina Mazumder acknowledged in 1974-75, in their note of dissent over the issue of political reservations for women (in the context of the preparation of the Towards Equality Report on the Status of Women in India for the United Nations), being firm 'believers in equal rights for women' went hand-in-hand with criticising the system of reservations of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, "as a legacy of colonial period institutionalising backwardness of a certain section of our population." Only their explorations into the generally deprived status of women after Independence, including women's surprisingly low representation within the legislatures, forced them to realise that applying the principle of equality in an

unequal context only intensified inequalities. However, they could not convince other committee members of that new stance. They even pointed out that the representative base of male legislatures had been expanding and changing its class composition in recent years. They mentioned, "In the case of women...the story is quite different...the background of women's legislatures is considerably narrower and represents mainly the dominant strata of our society" (Sarkar: Mazumdar: 2008). Along with that criticism, those women representatives lacked a sense of the ground realities and any close links with women's issues. It is interesting to note in the context that the only kind of reservations that found favour by the committee were reservations at the level of local Government – primarily the village councils or Panchayat.<sup>4</sup>

It was very significant that after implementation of one-third of seats at local, state, and national levels indicated increased numbers of women in legislative bodies. Nevertheless, it was shocking that the women's reservation had been pending for the past few decades and was only passed in Rajya Sabha in March 2010. The distance between the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha was ten steps, and the bill should be sabotaged in the name of consensus. Nonetheless, the 'announcement of reservation for women' opened new chapters of debates in the context of women's political empowerment. Films like *Samsodhan*, *Satta*, *Thalaivii*, and *Panchayat* have raised the issue that the reservation policy brings out authentic political empowerment for women? or is it just an eyewash. Does it indicate that women are improperly swayed and are influenced by male relatives or other male politicians?

*Indar Singh: Do you know that one-third of seats are reserved for women? So why don't you contest in the Panchayat election? ...shame on you.*

*Manju: How is it possible? Instead of household work, I have never participated in any external affairs.*

*Indar: How did you qualify for your school-level examination?*

*Manju:- I studied at home and went to school during*

exam time.

*Indar: you don't need to go anywhere. We just need your signature on the nomination form. Papaji and I will manage everything. You will just represent as so-called 'Panch'. We will control everything".*

(*Samsodhan*: 1996)<sup>5</sup>

The above dialogue has been taken from the film *Samsodhan* (1996). Director Govind Nihalani tried to establish the argument that, after the implementation of women's reservation in panchayat elections, the inferior position of women has never changed. It has been observed that many male members of political parties have chosen women candidates from their own families or communities. Thus, the power control would be centralised within the family or clan. Their director visualised the sequence in a high-angle shot. Thus, the inferiority and subordinate position would be maintained.

After the implementation of seat reservation for women in a panchayat at the National level, the first argument came against quota from several feminist groups, which is famous as the 'proxy argument'. Scholars like Madhu Kiswar and Nivedita Menon argued that many women candidates would be contested by proxy for their husband, father, or father-in-law. The critics focused on the question of which women would benefit from women's quotas since the bill did not specify criterion eligibility other than sex. Thus, Madhu Kiswar, editor of 'Manushi', argued that familial was likely to annihilate the democratising potential of the bill. She argued, "...chances are that we will be saddled with more biwi-beti brigades because leaders are likely to resort to fielding their mothers or sisters or wives to ensure that the women's quota stays within their control." (Kiswar: 1996) Scholars like Jay Prakash Narayan, Dhirubhai Seth, and Yogendra Yadav also argued that in such a situation, there was likely to be greater resentment against women, undermining the very objective of the Bill. Those men who got pushed out of their constituencies or who observed their friends' sides lined up would either sabotage female contenders in revenge or spend much of their political capital to help their female relatives concerning those reserved

seats. Such proxies would be expected to keep the seat safe for the men until the next election, when they would again try to reclaim their seats. (Narayan Jayprakash, Sethe Dhirubhai, Yadav Yogendra, Kiswar Madhu: 2004).

Films like *Satta* (2002), *Deoal* (2004), and *Panchayat* (2021) visualise women nominated as candidates from their own families. Thus, all power should be confined by male politicians. In the film *Satta* (2002), where protagonist Anuradha's in-laws' family was against women's emancipation there, and her husband was running, MLA Vivek Chauhan was arrested in a murder case then. Anuradha's in-laws requested her to contest in the election to save the seats. But they enforced her that when Vivek would be free from jail, she would have to give back the seat to her husband. This film raised questions against that proposal, which cleared that sometimes men could accept women's engagement in the public sphere or would propose to contest in the election. Still, the question of women's empowerment would be suppressed because women's identities could not exist independently of ideology. Therefore, the male could not accept women as neutral categories that would exist independently of all political considerations. Here I have mentioned the dialogue from the film *Satta* (2002).

Interestingly the second argument came from backwards-class leaders who saw the Women's Reservation Bill as an elite conspiracy. They thought that reservation would likely benefit mostly those women who belonged to the privileged or elite section of society. Gender justice would thus be a mere face, and social justice might suffer from women's quotas. Thus, OBC leaders had been demanding from 1996 onwards that a sub-quota be defined within the women's quota for backward caste women along with existing sub-quotas for SC and ST women (most recently, sub-quota was also demanded women belonging to minority communities). Leader Uma Bharti first claimed that the legislation did not provide guarantees for Backward Class women. She argued that the most oppressed segment of society was backward-class women, whose voices were the

most limited in Government. A leader of Rashtriya Janta Dal Raghuvansh Pratap Singh declared: "...only parties led by Brahmins would oppose separate reservations for OBCs, Dalits, and minorities...The concept of the reservation, after all, means for those who cannot make it on their own...It is not for those who can contest and win from a general seat. Why should anybody object to giving the deprived their share in power?"

In the context of post-nineties Indian films, women's participation in politics was confined to elite-class women, and the political rights of backward, Dalits, or minorities women were suppressed and neglected by hierarchies. Films like *Deol* (2004) and *Raajniti* (2011) highlighted the monopoly of elite-class women in Indian politics and similarly visualised of post-colonial marginalisation of minorities and the consolidation of Hindu dominance. Significantly post-nineties, Indian parallel films visualised hierarchical and male dominance in Indian politics; simultaneously, a tale film, *Pankh: Ek Urdan* (2007), highlighted that OBC men did not want a reservation for women. OBC women were insulted by repeated statements of those claiming to respect them, who virtually said that, in comparison to women of the upper castes, they were not capable of winning seats. The film was shot at Khagar village in Bihar. There visualised when Zinnat, an OBC woman, wanted to contest in the Panchayat election. Then, she was threatened by other OBC male members of the same village. Nevertheless, when she complained about her harassment, she was kidnapped and brutally sexually assaulted by other backwards-class male members. But the main positive side of the film is that with the influence of her determination at last, Zinnat could contest the panchayat election. As the first women OBC candidate, she was elected Panch in Khagaria village. The film highlighted that the problem was not that backwards-class women could not win seats but that OBC men who distributed tickets refused to share the benefits of the increased clout they had achieved in the post-Mondal mobilisations. Even in the case of nominations to legislative Councils or Rajya Sabha,

what did one make of the fact that only last month did the loan woman to be nominated from Bihar for the Rajya Sabha by the RJD belong to the upper cast? The Director of the film raised a pertinent question what prevented those who had declared war ostensibly on behalf of OBC women from nominating one in the parliament?

A third eminent question against reservation came at the end of the nineties on the issue of the 'efficiency' argument, underlining the difficulty of finding enough suitable candidates and, therefore, the risk of incompetent people being elected. Madhu Kiswar argued that "we should try to bring a qualitative change with women's participation in elected assemblies rather than bring it down further with simply joining as puppets in that unholy enterprise." (Kiswar Madhu: 1996). The debate about 'efficiency and merit' tied into the understanding of discrimination. Short film *Mujhe Pankh De Dyo: Chavi Rajawat* episode there visualised that when Chavi wished to contest in the Panchayat election there, she faced the question of her efficiency, though Chavi was enough educated and accomplished. In Govind Nihalani's film *Samsodhan* (1996) also visualised that when protagonist Vidya won the Panchayat election and started to interfere in village development, other male Panch members and Sarpanch raised questions about Vidya's efficiency. They claimed that since women were suitable in the home as wives-mothers-daughters-in-law and they were not comfortable in the public sphere or external affairs. Hence, as 'bumiputra', it was their duty to take every decision on behalf of the women Panch in the issue of development in their village.

The backlash argument warned that men threatened by quotas and resenting the forced eviction of their male colleagues were likely i) not to allow women to contest from reserved constituencies and ii) to confine the beneficiaries of quotas to some kind of female ghetto, allowing them to deal only with areas traditionally considered as soft such as health and education. Mulayam Singh Yadav, leader of the Samajwadi Party, opinion was against women's reservations because he thought that politics would

make women crazy. Instead, women played an important role in transforming society and looking after the next generation. Rather than pursuing a political role, he consoled women to work harder at home. It was very significant that male politicians who claimed that women were suitable in the home or accidentally if they would come into politics so they had to handle easy departments like culture, social welfare, etc.; they argued it from their fear that if they would give an inch, women would take a mile. Politicians at the panchayat level who thought women could pose no danger at the lowest tier of Government had already realised that. Even before some status, women began to exceed one-third of seats by contesting and winning from general seats. If that repeats parliament and assemblies frequently, the gender balance would change. Apart from 'Yadav Troyika', many other men and women objected to the mechanism of rotation of seats to be resolved for women. They argued that that would undermine democracy, as it would not allow MPs to nurture their constituencies.

The film *Thalaivii* (2021) has depicted that gender discrimination is one of the important causes which relegate the position of women in the political arena of India. It is a ground for denying rights and is not an argument posited in opposition to the notion of universal rights of women. In the political sphere, too is no equality for women. Throughout India, except for voters, women's participation as contestants, elected representatives, members of the Government, and so on was negligible. Regional and sectional patterns in political participation are manifested themselves with familiar correlations. The nature of problems is varied such as lack of time due to domestic responsibilities, sociocultural norms limiting mobility, and patriarchal.

Control, discouraging women from coming into conflict with men. Web series Panchayat has depicted that, at the village level, women leaders have faced so many problems as decision-makers, i.e. 1) No interaction with the Panchayat and other relevant officers. 2) Inactive or proxy members 3) internationalisation of socially defined gender roles

and an inherent acceptance of patriarchy, caste, and class barriers. 4) No articulation and inability to identify obstacles. Patriarchal values have combined with political intimidation from opposing parties and vested groups, and the system itself has hampered the functioning of Elected Women Representatives. The film, *Samsodhan* (1996) and *Satta* (2004) visualised that the elected women representatives have also faced an unhelpful and gender-insensitive state. Director Nihalni has pictured in the film *Samsodhan* (2004) that when protagonist Vidya wants to see the file to enquire about wage records of daily labour at Paldimina village, she is harassed by BDO and other officials several times. BDO has insulted her as an 'outsider'. Nihalani has pointed out through the film *Samsodhan* that there have been times when they have been turned away from the BDO's office or provided with inadequate information and when they have had to face genuine hospitality or ridicule from Government officials. He has visualised in his National Award-Winning film *Samsodham* (1996) that men with fear in their minds that women would vote for women candidates only and may even go to the extent of women's party. Out of the inferiority, male politicians could not accept the spontaneous involvement of women in politics. Their director also visualised in the interest of the male politicians that women's political apathy- both the voter and non-voter type has continued, and most of them still consider voting as a ritual to be performed at the bidding of their husbands or joint family elders without bothering about political parties, issues, candidates or about their problems.

In the film *Deoal* (2008), there has visualised that although women candidates have participated in their electioneering with vigour, most of the manipulative caste politics is handled by men. In some cases, the husbands even printed their names on the posters instead of their wives to show they were the de facto candidates. This attitude of the husbands is stretched to the extent that, in some places, victory processions have been taken out. In Govind Nihalani's *Samsodhan* (1996), there are visualised that several elected women are facing different types

of problems. In many places, there is a constant battle with the male sarpanches.

Who is waiting to discover a mistake made by the women sarpanches to pounce on them and get them disqualified? Out of disgust, some elected women have already started getting disillusioned and are willing to return to their domestic lives. In several instances, the gram steaks have not cooperated with the women's sarpanches.

The film *Satta* (2004) and documentary *Mujhe Pankh de dy': Chavi Rajawat* (2012) episode there have visualised that male politicians have looked at women decision-makers as inferiors because, in their viewpoint, women politicians have no political experiences, ideology, or enthusiasm. Most women politicians will get trapped between party requirements and its marginalisation of women's issues and women's groups and objectives of the movement. The film *Lajja* (2002) and *Sabdhan India fights back: Dhangri Murmu Episode* (2013) there are visualised that the increasing violence, sexual harassment, and victimisation of women at the ground level in many of our political parties have made their participation extremely hazardous in twenty-first-century politics of India. In that episode, there visualised that in Chamlighera village of West Midnapore in West Bengal, an incumbent Dalit woman Dhangri Murmur who contested in 2008 at village councillor post on behalf of the Communist Party of India (Marxists), was beaten up and abused by opponent political groups when she led an inquiry into a dubious land deal. Both her hands of her were broken, and she was gang-raped.

As audio-visual documentation, Indian parallel films focused on the issue of violence against women in the aspect of their spontaneous participation in politics. Several case studies mentioned male politicians mentally and even sexually harassing women politicians. Earlier in Orissa, an up sarpanch, Ms. Basmati Bara of Kutra panchayat of Sundergarh district had complained of sexual harassment by the Minister of the panchayat. The case had been taken up by the National Commission for Women. In Uttar Pradesh, 60 years old Limon Devi, a woman named

Pradhan, was murdered on 14th September 1999. She was Pradhan of Barauli Village in Bharatpur District. It has been alleged that her independent way of working was not liked by the Upa-pradhan, who wanted to misuse the powers of the gram panchayat. Eight armed persons attacked the house of Limon Devi at 8 am on 14th September 1999 and gunned her down. Her husband and son had also been assaulted. On 29th March 2001, the President of Urappakkam Panchayat in Tamil Nādu, Menka, was hacked to death by a four-member gang when she attended to her work in the office at 11.30 am. Four members armed with long knives entered the office, and before Menaka realised what was happening, they attacked her. She received injuries to the neck, head, and face and died on the spot. The film *Samsodhan* (1996), *Godmother* (1999), and *Thalaivii* (2021), there are visualised that women candidates have faced assaults when they have taken developmental steps for villagers. In the film 'God Mother', Protagonist Rambhi is killed by the opponent group when she implements inter-religion marriage in her village. Simultaneously in the movie *Samsodhan* (1996), protagonist Vidya's house is ransacked, and her husband is threatened when she wants to remove the corruption from Grampanchayat. And she has attacked several times when she has determined to reopen the village's primary school to eliminate child labour.

Eminent film director Govind Nihalni when he has directed the film *Samsodhan* in 1996; at that time, just Amendments 73 and 74 considered the reservation for women on Panchayat. So, the film emphasises the Panchayat system and what the woman Panch stands for. Very early in the movie, interest in the happy newlyweds has shifted to the wretchedness of low-income families dispossessed of their land by the village Thakur or overlord, the man being forced into bonded labour in the quarry. Thus, the notion of economic injustice in the caste-structured village society is introduced. At the same time, the film then takes on a political interest with the introduction of what would be its basic narrative element; the proclamation of the new law has ensured



one-third representation of women and low caste on village councils. Nihalni's narrative seeks to braid those strands as the young bride Vidya is elected to the council, and her sensitivity to the injustices of an unequal society has gradually made evident. Director Nihalni has explained a transition through the character of protagonist Vidya, how a shy homemaker would turn into an efficient and progressive decision-maker. Director also has technically visualised this. When Vidya is confused, he uses a wide-angle lens to focus on her lack of confidence in other confident male village councillors. But when she decided to fight against corruption, caste oppression, and labour oppression and was determined to reopen primary school at her council, the director took a close-up shot to visualise her realisation of political empowerment. When protagonist Vidya realises that as a woman village councillor, she is dominated by men, and if she wants to devote herself to the development of the village, she must overcome barriers of male dominance, then the director uses high focus lens. When Vidya shared her feelings with her mother-in-law, Nihalni took a close-up shot to analyze Vidya's self-actualisation. The dialogue is mentioned in the sequence.

Director Nihalni has tried to prove in his film *Samsodhan* that political participation is crucial in the struggles for democratisation. It has contributed to the creation and expansion of civil society and has been critical to the claims of various marginalised groups to representation in national political institutions. He has given me in an interview that the rising of social movements in the 1970s and 1980s has generated a double move from a critique of capitalism to an interest in the higher goals of rights, peace, solidarity, and democracy and from a focus on particularistic movements...to movements is motivated by universalistic values and objectives. For women's movements, that double mode created new opportunities and solidarities within the broad framework of democratisation. An arena of public politics where women's movements have attempted to bring together the public and the private is that of human rights and citizenship."<sup>6</sup>

The film *Thalaivii* (2021) visualised that; however, when women fought elections on party tickets for the first time, it revealed the reality of politics. In the name of electioneering, they have been introduced to the freedom to move out of their homes. If one candidate has decided to come out, her rival also has done it. The candidates have also met many common people when they have gone to seek their votes. In addition, the women who have won a large number, including those who have lost in electioneering, have got good exposure to political games. Sometimes women candidates have also rediscovered their villages. Many others in purdah have used the occasion to tell their communities that they could not canvas in purdah and met no resistance. Veils gradually get out of the way.

Post-nineties Indian parallel films have visualised that in the present political context of India, some women may, with courageous determination, overcome the physical constraint of domestic and other work and the restrictive patriarchal notions which generally deter them from politics. They have carefully taken more confrontationalist struggles to get political prominence. It is to the credit of the women's movement that women have played important roles in political struggles and have fought along with men in all major agitations and movements against colonialism for wages, price hikes, gender justice, etc. They have sat in dharnas, gheraoed officials, gone to jail, borne police beating, and shouldered the burden of struggles.

They often played supportive roles in sheltering activities, nursing, or messenger in order ground movements. And in emergencies and crises, women have also taken over leadership and sustained the movements. It is argued that if women enter the corridors of power, they will be able to take up women's issues within State structures and effect changes in the party and local bodies. The documentary film *Gulabi Gang* (2012)<sup>7</sup>, based on Sampat Devi Pal's activities there, highlighted that Matters came to a head last week of 2012 when the 'gang' members stormed the Atarra police station demanding the release of Bare Lal, husband of a gang

member, Sushila. He was detained following a dispute over constructing a water channel in Atarra. Sampat Devi Pal's 'gang' has around 35 members, and a new recruitment drive has been launched with Rs.200 as the registration fee for enlisting in the 'gang'. Filmmaker Nishtha Jain will be screening two of her documentaries in Hyderabad — *Gulabi Gang* that narrates a complex story of feminism and *City of Photos* in which she has led us into dingy neighbourhood studios giving shape to small and large picture-perfect dreams.

When Nishtha first heard of Sampat Pal and her *Gulabi Gang* <sup>8</sup> in 2008, she was surprised. "This movement began in a backward region like Bundelkhand, and the gang had 70,000 members in 2008. Now they are over 400,000. Most women are uneducated, have limited exposure beyond their homes and fields, and come from lower strata of society," <sup>9</sup> The filmmaker shot for 45 to 50 days in Bundelkhand between September 2010 and February 2011, when the gang was 150,000-member strong and led by 13 commanders in different districts. It isn't going to be a simple story of revolution. Many women, have explained Nishtha, are in different stages of understanding and exercising their rights. "The women I observed were in varied stages of consciousness and empowerment. There's a difference between preaching idealism and putting it to practice. Some women of the gang had their troubles at home"<sup>10</sup> Nishtha observed the members of the gang taking up cases about dowry deaths, sexual assaults, women scorned for inter-caste marriages and beyond the boundaries of feminism, looking into day-to-day issues like non-issuance of ration and BPL cards. "The women were such a rallying force, travelling in unsafe areas armed with their lathis," has explained Nishtha. Initially, the gang has come under flak for using the lathi. The women still travel with lathis but do not give in to violence. "Women use the lathis for self-defence; older women also use them as walking sticks."<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, there also visualised that the group has access to state resources to support women's groups and provide services for them. Their position and actions can legitimise the

women's cause in the eyes of the people and parties.

In the film *God Mother* (1999), Women have, in a short while, learned the skills of managing, debating, and policy making. They have generated much confidence in not only themselves but amongst neighbouring women and villages. Women are more likely and less afraid of approaching female co-operators directly than males. Whatever women have contested, regardless of whether they have won or lost, they created waves of confidence and determination.

However, the main reason for encouraging those women who have felt like stepping into the political world is not such reasons or the fact that they can bring services for women or that they will humanise or clean up politics. But their presence will herald the erosion of one area of the sexual division of labour between men and women in society- men in the outside, public world, and women in the private world of the home. It will challenge the cliché that politics is no place for women. And the acceptance of women as leaders will, in the long run, change to some degree the prevalent humiliating and condescending attitude towards women in general. In the film *Samsodhan* (1996), when protagonist Vidya finds corruption in her village council and villagers, contractual labourers are cheated by Sarpanch Indar Singh, immediately she challenges the Sarpanch and decides that the primary school will reopen the abandoned half-constructed building. She has gathered all women villagers and other women village councillors against Sarpanch to get proper justice. When she charged sarpanch Indar Singh with corruption, then, director Nihalani visualised the sequence using a telephoto lens and took a close-up shot to narrate the strong determination of Vidya. In the film 'God Mother' there, director Vinay Sukla visualised that on the first day of Rambhi's political journey, she devoted her life to the development of her village. Though she has turned from housewife to God Mother, she has carefully handled every issue, from water, health, reopening schools, and spreading adult education to the inter-religious marriage of Muslim boy Arsad and Hindu girl Sejal. She has fought

against patriarchal social strata at every step of her journey. She has even given her life to stop communal carnage. So, the premise is that there is a particular female psyche related to motherhood and care for the reproductive function of women, which makes her

biologically the best candidate for public life. According to the argument, women who are child bearers are intrinsically likelier to be votaries of peace, the harmony of honesty of being protectors of the environment, and so on.

**Notes:**

1. A woman's position as a wife has been given the highest place over all other roles she is required to play because it is here that she is required to perform the most arduous responsibilities.

2. Social scientist Mary E. John analysed on the ground of Naidu's opposition that Naidu was not a feminist, and she thought that women's tasks were nothing less than the spiritual reform of the world. (AIWC: 1930:21) Thus, even nationalism, in her view, limited the scope of women's transformative potential. Cultural distinction and political rights appear to follow seamlessly into one another and with a necessary consequence. Whereas cultural nationalism rested on claims of difference, women's politics drew upon the universal language of unity and individuality.

Jhon. E. Mary, 2008, Reservations and Women's Movement in Twentieth Century India, in the book of Reservations For Women, Edited by Meena Dhanda, Kali for Women, New Delhi, p-36

3. Mazumder Vina, 1979, 'Editors notes on symbols of power: women in the changing society, Allied Publisher, New Delhi, p-xvi

The limitations of women in politics became clear with the end of the freedom struggle. A large section of women who had spontaneously participated in the Anti-British Movement would have expected recognition of their role by the leadership of political parties in the first general election held in Independent India. However, the number of women candidates in the 1952 elections was negligible, and out of 499 candidates elected to the first Parliament, only 22 were women. The status was generous in issuing certificates of merit and appreciation for the heroic sacrifice of our mothers and sisters; the Patriarchy did not consider them heroic enough to contemplate sharing power with. The Parliamentary debates on the Hindu Code Bill in India's first elected Parliament were indicative of not only the hostility to equal rights for women in a substantial section of political leadership but also of the proclivity of the Indian state to compromise with such forces in violation of its own Constitution.

4. Sarkar Latika, Mazumdar Vina, 2008, 'Dissenting Voices' in Dhanda Meena's edited 'Reservations for women' New Delhi, Women Unlimited, p-11-17.

In 1985, at Nairobi Conference, the point of negligence to the involvement of women in Indian politics was critically discussed. Despite low literacy levels, which restricted their participation in other spheres of activity in society, women's participation in politics, both as voters and candidates, had been showing a constant upward trend. However, no significant women-related issues had been thrown up over the years. The document pointed out that woman's power had remained largely underutilized in India "by the polity

in general and political parties in particular. It felt that there was a great scope for collectivization and articulation of their demands in Indian politics. On reservation of seats for women in the legislatures, the paper stated that although it could provide a short-term solution, in the long run, it might prove to be counterproductive because it might fail to convince the people of the inequalities and might, on the other hand, hide the reality of discrimination against women, who might alienate the leadership from the masses and the real issues affecting them. There was also an inherent possibility of harm to the individual women's sense of autonomy and dignity. With the influence of the Nairobi Conference National, Perspective Plan was formulated by India in 1988. The plan made several recommendations on educating and sensitizing not only women but also people in power on the need to get women into active politics and on women's issues. It also suggested that the Government should take the initiative for the effective participation of women at national, state, and local decision-making levels not in soft sectors but in the core sectors of development.

5. The dialogue has been taken from the film 'Samsodhan' (1996), directed by Govind Nihalani. The film was strong documentation in favour of women's reservation and their spontaneous participation in the Panchayat election.
6. The interview was taken on 7.11.2013, in Pune, at her residence.
7. Recently Film is also made on 'Gulab Gang' in 2014.
8. The 'gang' owes its name to the strict dress code imposed by Pal. All members have to be dressed in pink sarees and blouses and functioned as self-styled vigilantes in a region where power and pelf literally flowed from the barrel of the gun. But the 'Gulabi gang' was a non-political organisation, bereft of any ideology or political leanings, though the BahujanSamaj Party and the Samajwadi Party have tried to woo Pal.
9. Nishita's interview has taken on May 2013 at Indian Habited Centre, New Delhi.
10. ibid
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**Dr Debjani Halder is a National Award-winning Documentary filmmaker, film curator, and film historian. She is in the faculty of Filmmaking at RV University, Bangalore.**