

Article

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Violence on Women



Parched

During COVID and social distancing, the film industry got stuck and produced fewer films; there were very few OTT releases, and ‘*Tasher Ghor*’, a short film in Bengali, got released on a Bengali OTT platform. Shot in length and monochromatic in colour, it had only one actor and maintained all the conditions of social distancing. These days, ‘*Lapata Ladies*’ is creating quite a furore for the brilliant portrayal of Indian conjugal status and the condition of women, especially the rural ones. One must admit that ‘*Tasher Ghor*’ is no less, but probably being a regional film and by being a little too dark at the end, has not gained such wide recognition. The protagonist is named Sujata. A docile housewife who loves to stay at home enjoys baking, and a cup of tea alone reigns throughout the film, and it has to be admitted that Swastika Mukherjee has carried out the

role of Sujata with classic elan and grace. The movies *Lapata Ladies* and *Taser Ghor* deal with women's issues. Both are fairy tales in their ways, but the mammoth popularity of ‘*Lapata Ladies*’ is that this fairy tale ends in utmost happiness, whereas ‘*Taser Ghor*’ ends on a dark note.

The selection of Sujata is highly paradoxical as it connotes the myth of a pious woman spreading mercy and feeding Lord Buddha. Our Sujata loves her household chores to an extreme extent, and baking is her priority, whereas, in her personal life, she is baked regularly by a toxic husband. The most significant point is that she has accepted being baked very often. She is not a radical protagonist right from the very beginning. Marital rape, the husband's affair outside marriage, lockdown and the consistent presence of the husband at home brings out

her disgust. Sensitive to smells, Sujata continues to suffocate, taking suffering as the typical destiny of womanhood. The credit of the film stays in the fact that it is based on a soliloquy, and the narration is a flawless piece of monologue floating through the urban flat and garden, inviting all the emotions, ups and downs, disgust and the undercurrent of violence.

Sujata is a victim of marital rape and domestic violence, and she is habituated to endure all the abuses. However, there is a particular disturbance in the movie, in the metaphor of the mice and Sujata's effort to kill them, to try baking and poisoning to get rid of the mice. The torture unleashed on Sujata is both mental and physical. Her humiliation seems endless and unrelenting, and she becomes ruthlessly cruel.



The hidden violence in *Sujata*, played excellently by Swastika Mukherjee, is pathetically lyrical and pathological, born out of a failed, oppressive marriage, daily abuse and abortion, ultimately resulting in the killing of her husband. She might seem a psycho at times, especially when she allows her mother-in-law to die because of external bleeding as she enjoys a film with snacks in the next room. A psychological probe into her

case would reveal a deeply injured soul, caged by the claws of patriarchy.

Sujata murders her husband to get herself liberated. Her criminal act is not considered heinous by herself as she hums "Amar mukti aloy aloy" to celebrate her newly gained freedom. It shows how tired and disgusted she was with her conjugal life. Is the murder essential to get freed? Probably, her mindset has become murderous through prolonged suffering. The murder of the husband figure is metaphorical as he represents the tortuous side of patriarchy. The violent method applied to kill a human being is considered normal in the case of mice.

Parched is another film on female emancipation and liberation which projects a protest against patriarchy in the form of the murder of the husband. *Parched* is the story of rural women of Rajasthan. The background is that of an average Rajasthani village where it is customary to beat the wife, to rape her and to go to the notch girl for entertainment. Three women, Rani, Lajo, Lajvanti, and Bijli, face their own lives and challenges. Despite the vast difference in background, social status, and cultural ethos, we can find a Sujata in each of them. All are victims of the social system which suffocates and kills the feminine in women. Rani gets her son married to a teenager who is most unwilling to get married and cuts off her hair to avoid the marriage. The protest is apparent but results in failure because hair will grow eventually. The teenage husband, portrayed brilliantly by Riddhi Sen, is the patriarch of the household who rapes the bride to perform the rights and rites of the husband, steals money from his mother and indulges in local violence. Rani, played by Tannistha Chatterjee, is one of

those millions of unfortunate souls abandoned by her husband and left alone with an adolescent son whom she fails to groom. Life has embittered her as it has also embittered Lajo. Lajo, played by Radhika Apte, is the typical rural wife who gets beaten and raped regularly, and yet she giggles.

All that Lajo demands from life is a child, which her impotent husband fails to provide. Rani and Lajo endure domestic violence, thinking that it is an inevitable part of life. These women only laugh when they meet along with Bijli, the only entertainer. Bijli is the local item dancer and prostitute who has some regulated liberation compared to the homemakers. The three women share their laughter and sorrows, and Bijli's vehicle transports them to a different world. In this world, they can laugh openly, address each other's problems and ask openly why all the abusive words are against women. All the f.. words humiliate female existence, and these three women invent abusive words to humiliate male existence to express their fury. This they cannot do in public life, but in a remote open-air space, they pour out all their grievances, and in this journey, Rani empathises with her daughter-in-law by accepting her in their adventure for freedom. The throttle that these women have experienced throughout their lives leads them towards a kind of desperation. They revolt in their ways, maybe from the frying pan to the fire of patriarchy.

As Rani's daughter-in-law escapes with her fiancé towards an uncertain future, Rani, Lajo, and Bijli's journey to Mumbai becomes more uncertain and full of the possibility of getting lost in the furore of city life. But they chose uncertainty, even at the cost of their

traditional domestic life, which has shattered their physical and mental existence. The celebrated short '*Juice*' had shown the flicker of rebellion from the clutches of kitchendom.'



The Great Indian Kitchen shows the barbarity of Kitchen Kingdom, where patriarchy has conspired to make 'her' the queen of Kitchen Kingdom to get the best service out of her and yet made her a sex slave. Women getting violent to get rid of the maladies of conjugal life might seem grotesque on the screen, which has traditionally glorified the submissive feminine. Still, gradually, the desperation of women caged in domestic furnaces under the name of domestic bliss is getting accepted.

Sujata belongs to an urban household that stands in the same space as Rani, Lajo, or Bijli. The strange man on Rani's phone is introduced as Shahrukh Khan and keeps on tantalising her. A tired Rani sometimes enjoys the anonymous phone call but ultimately gets exasperated and says that she is married, abandoned by her husband, is aged 37 and has a young married son. Now, is there any taker? Why has the woman been taken?

Where is the women's own space? Is it her father's home or her in-law's space? Taken from her father's side, it is also a patriarchal boundary. Has she somewhere to go? The most acclaimed '*Lapata Ladies*' has

two sets of couples. One is the love-lorn one, the ideal husband and ideal wife who long for each other in estrangement, and a child bride gets a safe shelter with an older woman in the station. The other is the rebel wife, who wants to escape from the rough and rude groom who already has a history of killing his first wife. She wants to escape from her husband and study and pursue a career by rejecting a marriage that she never wanted to get into. Escape seems to be a fairy tale in which the police officer plays the role of the good angel. But how far has reality been projected here? Women in police custody remain the most unsafe. A child bride in a lonely railway station gets abused most efficiently and is not very well accepted by the in-laws. It is clear that the audience prefers fairy tales to reality. Compared to that, violence and women are a distant theme for the audience. A flicker of fire in a girl is supposed to be dangerous for the family structure.

Suppression, to an extreme extent, gives birth to violence. It is good to see that women in Indian cinema not only play the victim card. Now, the protests come in extreme forms. This is not to be taken literally. It shows how cruelly and desperately the world treats the woman. A happy ending for a child bride or an escape from a ruthless situation magically is not the ultimate.

Latent violence in women was most terrifyingly portrayed in the short film called *Chutney*. The housewife, portrayed wonderfully by Tiska Chopra, has superb command over the situations, as does her flirtatious husband, played by Adil Hussain, and the colourful neighbour, played by Rasika Duggal. As a typical middle-aged housewife, Vanita finds her husband going ga ga over the

vibrant neighbour; she casually invites sir over for fritters and chutney to her home. She is casually narrating the tale of the murder of the former servant. Still, the actual violence of the story lies in Vanita's decision to bury the body deep underground in the courtyard and plant some herbs and plants on it so that chutney can be made out of homegrown products when needed! The horror of the situation prevails throughout the story, and it shows how violence, which is traditionally depicted as alien to women, can be very much a part of our identity when her natural femininity and softness are shattered.

Violence is supposed to be the most negative of all energies. Despite that, violence in male figures that has always been celebrated on stream has always been celebrated on screen. What is supposed to be heroic for the male was a no-no for women. A sort of bipolarity existed as men or masculinity is equivalent to violence, whereas femininity is equivalent to nonviolence. This norm has been questioned through various films, whether on a big screen or OTT, and the reasons behind female violence have been questioned, too.



The very recent presentation in the movie '*Mrs*' violence comes in the form of throwing dirty water to the face of the in-laws and husband as the girl feels humiliated and

suffocated in the situations she had to face in her in-law's house. This was unthinkable even before 20 years. Adjustment and compromise are the two things a woman carries as her dowry. It is good to see that the conditions of adjustment and compromisation are being

questioned. Sometimes, it is through severe physical violence, and sometimes, it is through brutal revolt women are fighting back. Maybe it is hard to digest on screen, but gradually, it is getting accepted.

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