



“QUEEN”: VERSATILENESS AND SELF-DISCOVERY OF WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

Indian movies especially Bollywood has been an integral part in the lives of masses. It is a huge business in India with credible impact on our socioeconomic and political system. Some movies are for entertainment while some convey strong message to the society. One such movie ‘Queen’ directed by Vikas Bahl exposes the versatility and self-discovery of a woman. Since time immemorial women have been subjected to emotional, mental and physical atrocities by the patriarchal mindset.

The deep rooted gender stereotypes and gender role ascribed by societal norms have long been major hurdles on the path to accomplish gender equality. Though women’s right group and activists have championed for the equal rights and opportunities for women in the society, it has not been enough to end gender imbalance. Perhaps each woman has to be strong and adaptable to come out of the situation she faces instead of meekly accepting it as destiny.

Rani (Kangana Ranaut) the protagonist of the movie ‘Queen’ is all set to marry Vijay (Rajkumar Rao) but he backs out of alliance at the last minute citing now Rani didn’t match his standard. It was he who had persuaded Rani while she was studying and dumped her so unceremoniously just before their marriage. Rani a simple Indian girl didn’t let this unfortunate incident to be unfortunate. She took matters into her hand and declared she would continue with her pre-booked honeymoon alone. She didn’t choose to whimper at the turn of events but decided to live on her own terms.

In Indian culture there is a misconception that single biggest achievement in the life of a girl is to get married. But ‘Queen’ proved that wrong. It portrayed how calling off marriage affected man too.

Key Words: marriage, self-dependant, gender equality, Indian culture

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The world has largely been led by patriarchal societies and women have through the years largely remained quiet in the face of atrocities. There is a growing perception that strong can bully the feeble. Women constitute half the population of the world yet on account of being physically weaker is subjected to various cruelties by the other half of the population. Similarly, physically challenged and transgender too are oppressed and harassed by the

so called normal people. All human beings are essentially equal by law of nature and any inequality based on gender, class, colour, or physical disability is irrational. Biologically women are not lesser human beings but our social norms and customs make them inferior than men. The holy scriptures of major religion of the world too doesn’t treat women differently then why women are in so deplorable situation. Who is to be blamed? Is it women

themselves who allowed men to shrink them in such lowly position, or men who manipulated the religious texts and laws in their favour. We need to introspect about it and find out ways to stand for our rights. We are not allowed to be ourselves, to do things according to our wish. We have to follow what men want us to follow. We are represented in less number in all the major powerful positions. There are just few women politicians, ministers, C.E.Os, writers, officers, doctors. We are still viewed as fit to be in home and do the mundane household duties. We are in possession of less intelligence and strength according to men and so we can be cowed down. Education perhaps is the greatest tool to bring change in the mind-set of both men and women. It brings confidence and self respect in an individual. 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' – Nelson Mandela.

Indian movies are a powerful tool to show reflection to the society. In recent times especially, many women-centric movies have been made. Earlier in movies, generally women played the part of singing and dancing around the trees or chasing the heroes. But, now the realisation came that women too have voice of their own and they should portray the chauvinist attitude of males. It's not that the movies only talk about women empowerment; they try to showcase how women fight against all odds to overcome the difficulties they face in their life. The year 2016 has been full of female oriented movies, the most recent one being *Dangal*. The wrestler father Mahavir Singh Phogat couldn't follow his dreams due to family constrains, vowed to make his son win gold medal in wrestling for India but his wife gave birth to four daughters. It is unsaid dictum that wrestling is for men, but Mahavir gave up his obsession for having son and trains his daughters in wrestling and they won gold medals for the country. He realised a gold medal is gold whether won by a boy or a girl. This achievement is more relevant considering that Haryana has one of India's worst child sex ratio and a shocking track record in the matter of female foeticide and infanticide. The recently concluded Olympics (2016) in Brazil established the fact that women are no less

than men. All the three medals for India were won by women.

Another movie *Pink* too exposed patriarchal mindset as it focuses on the ordeal of three single girls. The girls bonding are exemplary as they stood for each other when their lifestyle was not approved by the society. It brings home the point that leading a certain kind of life by women doesn't make them any lesser women or it doesn't project to the other sex that they are available. Two movies by Aishwarya Rai *Jazba* and *Sarabjeet* again portray strong and courageous woman as mother and sister respectively. *Neerja* a brave air hostess played by Sonam Kapoor fought bravely against terrorists who had hijacked the plane. In the process she lost her life. Thus it's not men only who are brave and can put their life to danger, women too can do the same. Similarly in *Kahani-2*, the subject of child abuse is taken by the protagonist Durga Rani Singh. Sonakshi Singh's movies *Force 2* and *Akira* presents the self defence technique a woman can adopt when faced with challenging situations. *Ki & Ka* shows the portrayal of man and woman in opposite roles where a man stays at home and a woman goes out to work. This is against the social norm where a woman is supposed to do household work and a man goes out to work to earn money. Thus, we can now see Indian movies are representing women in the right direction.

The world failed to empathize with the grievances of women. A notion that women belong in the kitchen is synonymous with misogyny in society. Women have been mostly found at the receiving end. Feminists have long criticised the institution of marriage. They stated that marriage leads to oppression of women and their rights curtailed. The gender inequality is judged from the fact that mostly women take up domestic and caring work and they get paid less than men for outside work. Traditionally, all men give speech and the women surrender her name to take her husband's name. A woman is supposed to follow the footsteps of man and agree to all his whims. Her ideas and desires are considered irrelevant by male hierarchy. Bette Davis said, "When a man gives his opinion, he's a man. When a woman gives her opinion, she's

a bitch.” (Published in Times Life, November 27, 2016)

Queen released theatrically on 7 March 2014 touches the subject of marriage and its importance in the life of an Indian girl. Rani the protagonist of the movie is excited and happy to be chosen by one of the most perfect man of Rajaouri. It is always imbibed in the minds of young girls that to be married is the greatest achievement she can ever have in her life and Rani is fortunate to be chosen by one of the most eligible bachelor. The film opens with the celebration scene where women are practicing dance moves and in the background we can see the house is decorated with blinking lights and heart shaped ‘Vijay weds Rani’; sweets are packed. The bride is applied mehendi and she is little apprehensive and nervous about her first wedding night and all the paraphernalia that goes with the wedding. But two days before her wedding Vijay (her fiancé) called her to meet and in spite of girls not being allowed to meet the groom just before wedding Rani goes to meet him. All hell broke loose when Vijay declared that he can’t marry her. The reason for his sudden change of heart was that his job, meetings, travelling, lifestyle in London where he lives presently is of too high status for Rani, a simple and homely girl. He says, ‘lot of things have been changed’ Rani is taken aback by the sudden change of events. She says, ‘*kyun kya change hua hai, kuch change nahin hua hai, main tu same hoon.*’ He makes it clear to her, ‘*tum waise ki waise hi ho..... main badal gaya hoon yaar.*’ She implores him to change his decision as her parents won’t be able to accept the last minute cancellation of marriage and may get heart attack. She even says nobody will marry her once her wedding is called off with him as is the custom of India. He simply responds to her tears by saying that a boy of her ‘type’ from Rajouri will marry her. No amount of her cajoling relented Vijay who stuck to his decision. The whole household which was bubbling with the preparation of the wedding is suddenly plunged into darkness.

She locks herself in her room, reliving memories of Vijay’s initial courtship. The flashback give glimpse to the audience how they were introduced to each other and Vijay wooed her with

his antics. This period of mourning establishes the fact that she has loving family. Her parents and younger brother are worried and protective. Nobody blames her for the break up or forces her to reconcile with him. Rani is finally motivated by the words of her grandmother, who says, ‘*Mera bhi boyfriend tha Faisal ... phir tere dadaji mil gaye refugee camp mein ... kaun kahan mil jata hai beta kis ko kya pata tu kisi baat ki chintaa iss waqt mat kar bas apni zindagi ji aaram se bilkul jo milna hota hai na zindagi mein woh mil ke rahta hai uss ko nahin koi rok sakta. Aaj tere ko lag raha hai teri zindagi khatam kal ko phir sab theek ho jana hai parson tu aapne aa ke kahna hai dadi jo hua acha hi hua.*’ She chose not to crib at the sudden change of her destiny. She declared on the breakfast table ‘*main apne honeymoon pe jana chahti hoon*’. The honeymoon which she had carefully and secretly planned with her friend and also shared with the bank employee about her plan to go to Paris and Amsterdam the next day of her wedding. Rani loved and pampered by her family had never been in distress or lived anywhere alone, made a decision to go on her honeymoon alone. She didn’t let this calamity abort her dream.

Rani who had always lived a protected life with her family is exposed to a new world. As the story unfolds we embark with Rani on a journey to an unknown land far away from her loving family and share her experiences of surviving in a country with different language, culture and food habits. Initially she does face plethora of problems in a foreign land, apart from the emotional turmoil she was going through. While talking on phone she asked her parents if Vijay had called or if they had spoken to Vijay’s parents. Her mother consoles her and asks her to roam around in Paris and forget the past. She faces problems while travelling in the foreign land and when she ordered food in a restaurant. She does not really shake off the shackles of traditions and society. She fear strangers and is unable to adjust into a new environment and is scandalized each time she gets a culture shock like public display of affection or women drinking or smoking during her trip. But we do come across her courageous side when she fights a thief to save her

purse from him. At one point of time she even thinks to quit and go back to India.

She does find some solace under the guidance of Vijaylakshmi, half-Indian hotel employee who lived life on her own terms. This other Vijay played by Lisa Hayden takes Rani under her wing. Perhaps it is quite deliberate that her name is also Vijay. She gives Rani means and courage to navigate in new world and introduces her to experiences she would have avoided in the past. Traditional upbringing confused Rani at the lifestyle of Vijaylakshmi. In her amazement she asks her, '*bina shaadi ke bacha, Paris mein aisa chalta hai*'. Vijaylakshmi, a single mother takes Rani out drinking, dancing and sight-seeing. Earlier we had seen traumatised Rani running away from the Eiffel Tower, a symbol of her failed relationship, ends up visiting it with another Vijay. Later, as she gets experience of living by herself she is better equipped to face life in general – psychologically and practically. She drinks alcohol for the first time and also dances at a public place, though as she goes into flashback and remembers her fiancé does not like her dancing at public place. There is angst, aggression and vengeance in her dancing moves. Rani discovers the joys of breaking free, cherishing life and living on her own terms. She now lives with progressive thoughts, ideas and beliefs. There is transformation of meek and docile Indian girl into a strong headed, confident woman. She learns that being exposed to new ideas and experimenting with new activities doesn't compromise one's identity or morality.

Her trip to Amsterdam puts her again in awkward position when she has to stay in the same room with multi-cultural men; Taka from Japan, Tim a black Frenchman and a good looking Oleksander from Russia. Rani gradually is learning the meaning of friendship and freedom in a land far away from home. She also strikes friendship with an Italian chef who pushes Rani to prove something to the world. She takes the challenge of the chef and prepares '*golgappas*' which becomes a hit amongst the foreigners and Rani's confidence level rises to a new high. The time spent in her honeymoon has been used by the director of the movie to explain various internal hurdles that she overcomes during the trip.

Meanwhile her fiancé has been trying to again contact her but now she is reluctant to take his call. He even reaches Amsterdam in search of her. However when she meets him, she clearly tells him that she will talk to him in Delhi. It is now his turn to implore her to forgive him and forget everything and accept him.

The crux of the movie is the last scene where Vikas Bahl didn't feel the need to have a traditional happy ending for Rani. Rani goes to meet Vijay in Delhi after she returns back from her honeymoon but not to reconcile with him rather to return back the engagement ring. In India, traditionally a movie is applauded by the audience when a boy and girl get together as it is considered happy ending. *Queen* undoubtedly made a strong statement with the central plot of a girl moving on after being left at the altar and rediscovering herself. The film beautifully portrays the message that woman is not an '*abla nari*'. The film mocks the traditional belief of how a girl's life is over if her wedding is called off. Brief flashbacks throughout the film establish the fact that Rani has been too passive in the past, lacking the determination to do what she wants. Vijay takes advantage of this fact but Rani's journey makes her realise that she is an individual who deserves to find and follow her dreams. Ultimately, we see that even Vijay's life is in turmoil after Rani refused him.

Marriage should be based on wonderful relationship between man and woman but not to the extent that a woman is defined only when she gets married or being married is the only way to live. Marriage is still a socio-legal concept in India with deeper significance. Marriage is seen a sacred bond between a man and a woman. It is a religiously and socially recognised union between two individuals with the aim of establishing family and raising children. Unlike Western countries here one-night stand, homosexuality, live-in-relationships or sex before marriage is a taboo. The institution of marriage in India is not just for the sake of sanctioning sex between man and woman. It is a union between two families and the members of the united family discharge their duties and social commitments based on human values. They inspire each other and strive for their growth morally, intellectually and spiritually. Parents play a

supportive role in the selection of prospective grooms and brides for their children. For most women, getting married is made into a priority by families. Once that happens, they are expected to have children and settle down.

Mary Wollstonecraft rightly reasons in chapter 4 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that marriage should resemble friendship because husband and wife are companions. Jane Austen uses irony to criticize marriage. One of the most famous ironies in the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813): "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (p. 1) though the plots of the novel depict it is women without fortunes who need husbands and seek them out. Mrs. Bennet, the mother is always on the lookout of husbands for her daughters.

The idea of '*ladki paraya dhan hoti hai*' needs to go. Author Poornima Bhaskar recalls a few 'well-meaning' comments from her own family members, 'Lose weight now. You can gain it after marriage'. And also: 'If you become too successful, you'll never find someone.' Perhaps most of us have grown up hearing these kinds of statements. Women are only allowed to date someone whom she can marry. The idea is that why should she hang around with man when she should be looking for a man to marry. For girls every guy is either a potential groom or a public embarrassment. It is expected from women to change their surname post-marriage. Basically men can't handle strong women who can express their opinion. They want women who stay mute and nod their head in agreement on all matters.

Women are expected to be perfect and if she puts effort into something it is remarked 'she's trying too hard'. Writer Anusha Subramaniam asks, "Why aren't women allowed to show weakness and the strength that goes into overcoming those weaknesses." Body shaming, a new trend on social media, where overweight women are ridiculed for their obesity or choice of their dress. It is as if women are under the constant scrutiny of men. We don't have the privilege to be ourselves. Why can't we dress as we like and be as we are? Even in the work place women are often interrupted or ignored in meetings. Men tend to drown women's voices

particularly if they are in small number in a group. They are less likely to be heard in a group. Man can't treat a woman just as female colleague; he either tries to handle her work for her or try to handle her. If they are competing with women on the same level then worst stereotypes kick in. Boys may be taught to protect and respect women, but when are they ever taught to treat them as equals? This question needs to be introspected. If a woman shows anger or is assertive, she is termed as aggressive while an angry man is deemed strong. What hypocrisy!

Women want to retain their identity after marriage. She doesn't consider marriage as an ultimate destination. They know there are lot of sacrifices both partners have to make and huge responsibilities that they have to shoulder together and a lot of struggle the couple has to endure to make it work. The idea that one has to get married because it is a social norm is changing. Marriage certainly provides a boundary and a life around marriage and children is healthy. We do believe in the sanctity of marriage where one has to give the other person as much importance and respect one gives to oneself. The desire to get married is still dictated by simple human longing for companionship and security. Social stigma is one of the reasons people get married, peer pressure and religion being the other two. Marriage creates a sense of responsibility and commitment. In our youth we may be surrounded by many friends but as we grow older, friends change, jobs change and families become distant or may fall apart, then we need one companion who is your constant support with whom you can share your happiness and silences too. A wise person said, 'Love is blind but marriage is an eye opener.' Marriage is important for both man and woman; it is NOT a need for a woman.

Christine de Pizan argued in her famous work *The City of Ladies* (1404) 'neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues.' This argument is definitely relevant till date as mostly women are blamed for everything and men are never questioned for their actions. This double standard must go from the society and our Indian movies are certainly taking right step in this

direction. William Thompson said a married woman becomes a piece of 'movable property and an ever-obedient servant to the bidding of man.' They are 'breeding machine' for their husband. The male-based authority and power structure is the reason for oppression and inequality and as long as this system will prevail the society cannot be reformed. Women could free themselves only if they can overthrow and reconstruct the society according to their goals.

To understand the problems women face in our society, many issues are to be alighted. Its consequences and severity form certain thoughts and impressions in our mind. Bias against women isn't an outcome of patriarchal mindset alone; the problem has roots in the mind of women too. Thus while men have to be sensitised, efforts to make girls and women realise their rights are needed too. Although many concerted efforts are being made not just through the law and administration but through many endeavours by private and socially conscious bodies. The change in the thinking of certain archaic beliefs and practices are necessary to improve women's status in society. There are still many gaps and areas which need immediate attention. But we sincerely hope that through efforts being made, there shall definitely be change in the perception of men about women.

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