



THE POLITICS OF REVENGE: PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH AND VULNERABILITY OF FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN THE FILM *KAHAANI*

SYEDA NATASHA MUKHTER

Lecturer, Department of English, European University of Bangladesh
RupayanShelford, Mirpur Road, Shamoly, Dhaka-1207
E-mail: syeda.natashaju@gmail.com



SYEDA NATASHA
MUKHTER

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an insightful and an analytical view of the way of taking revenge in Sujoy Ghosh's film *Kahaani*. This short library research reveals an argument whether Vidya Bagchi takes revenge of her husband's death for the self-desire through much intellectually or she wants to show female vulnerability does not always be powerless and it can also be used for taking blood vengeance. It also shows psychoanalytic approach of Vidya's character and the representation of pregnant woman who is taking 'revenge' of her dead husband by using prosthetic pregnant belly and this is totally secret to the audience and also to the characters in this film which is still unexplored. This is a new type of Commercial Hindi film which is woman-centric and reveals protagonist's own intelligent. This study aims at analyzing Sujoy Ghosh's film *Kahaani's* from the point of view revenge, draws the contemporary Hindi film where female character is a protagonist as well as it focuses on female protagonist's psychological status and her vulnerability in the point of view 'male gaze'. For better understanding of male gaze, this paper focuses on Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

Key words: Revenge .Psychoanalysis . Representation of women vulnerability . 'Male gaze', *Kahaani*.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

Introduction

According to Wikipedia, free Encyclopedia Revenge is a form of primitive justice usually assumed to be enacted in the absence of the formal law and jurisprudence. Often, revenge is defined as being a harmful action against a person or group in response to a grievance, be it real or perceived. It is used to right a wrong by going outside of the law. Revenge is also known as payback, retribution, retaliation or vengeance; it may be characterized as a form of justice (not to be confused with retributive justice). Francis Bacon described it as a kind of "wild

justice" that "does... offend the law [and] putteth the law out of office". Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani*, set in the 2012s India in the city of Kolkata which is mixed of modernity and old-world Charm, shows a pregnant woman's way of taking revenge. It is woman-centric commercial Hindi thriller film.

Discussion

Charles K. B. Barton, contending revenge, refers to that it reasonably considers a judgment of moral law: for Barton 'revenge is a form of punishment' and anyone who seeks revenge without appealing to the moral justification

associated with punishment is the best 'confused' or imperfectly socialized. Suzanne Uniacke gives explanation why revenge is wrong, refers to it as 'payback for an injury *qua* injury' and as typically malicious'; Uniacke asserts the term 'vengeance' retribution which demands the moral judgment on an offence. Even Robert Nozick gives a convincing account of difference between retribution and revenge, 'revenge involves a particular emotional tone, pleasure in the suffering of another.' Revenge in Elizabethan era, a central character has a serious sorrow against menacing opponent. This central character seeks revenge privately and takes all things into his own hands when law has failed to give him justice. In Elizabethan revenge play, only Hamlet shows his awareness to the moral implications at the time of executing his revenge.

So, after the discussion about the revenge, now this paper turns to Elizabethan era's two important plays which show how the politics of revenge operates in these two plays. *Hamlet* written by William Shakespeare and *The Spanish Tragedy* written by Thomas Kyd, these two plays bear all of the characteristics of the politics of revenge tragedy. In *Hamlet*, the ghost who is father of Hamlet says to take revenge upon his uncle Claudius because Claudius is the killer of Hamlet's father. But Hamlet delays many times to take his avenge and at the very last scene Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes, Gertrude all are dead without Horatio. Death of all main characters in *Hamlet*, this play follows the regular conventions of Elizabethan revenge tragedy. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, when Hieronimo locates his own son Horatio's body hanging in the arbor in his own garden and he was murdered by Lorenzo's servant, Hieronimo's grief goes to an utmost level. He determines to take his dead son's revenge. Bowers states that as far as Elizabethan law was concerned, "[b]lood- revenge for the murder of a close relative ... falls in the same legal category as any other murder with malice afore thought" (Bowers 11). Elizabethan era's way of politics of taking revenge of the characters is so much relevant in contemporary Hindi film's character and this paper deals with a female revenger whose name is Vidya and she is the protagonist in the film *Kahaani*.

Keeping the idea of Elizabethan era's play and way of taking revenge, the film *Kahaani* where Vidya is a software engineer and the protagonist. She comes from London to Kolkata for taking revenge of her husband's death. Her husband and many other people were killed because of a poison gas attack on a Kolkata Metro Rail compartment. Milan Damji who is antagonist in this film and induces this poison gas attack in the railway compartment. Milan Damji and Arup Basu both are the IB officer and colleagues. Vidya applies many wonderful tactics and strategy to accomplish her avenge. First of all, being seven months pregnant is her strategy to take revenge but in reality she is not pregnant. It is the politics of revenge because everyone gives their sympathy towards a pregnant woman. She uses her vulnerability as her weapon. Vidya does not keep any evidence in her guest house room. She always wipes out furniture so that her finger print never exists. This is her strategy and intellect. According to the film, when she first goes to the Kalighat Police Station, police gives her sympathy and is devoted to help her so that she can find out her lost husband. Secondly, she is also intelligent and educated. How she hacks computer transferring important data, this is so hard work and time consuming work also. Thirdly, she is brave. She comes in India alone from London. Most significantly how she fights with Milan Damji is significant. Her act of strategy of taking revenge is similar to Machiavellian characteristics. A Machiavellian character is duplicitous. Vidya is double faced in this film. Her duplicity is contravention doubleness of her thought, speech and action. A Machiavellian character is tricky. Vidya has used many tactics to take her revenge. Her prosthetic belly represents that she used to be as a pregnant woman and telling a fake story with ease. Machiavellian character can manipulate other by his/ her words. Vidya is also like that. She manipulates police officer Rana and IB officer Khan to rig and reach her goal. A Machiavellian character does not reveal his/ her real reason in front of anyone. Vidya who is the revenger, she also hides her real reason of finding Milan Damji and Arnab Bagchi. A Machiavellian character is narcissistic. Vidya is also narcissistic because she has extreme and enormous feeling of

self- importance. She does everything for her self-interest. With the idea of 'narcissism', now this paper will discuss about psychoanalysis of Vidya's character. How Vidya takes revenge for her own 'pleasure' in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis.

The idea of 'pleasure' is relevant in this film. 'Catharsis (or *Katharsis*) brings pleasure by mitigating excessive emotion of mind. Catharsis is achieved through witnessing of tragedy, and then tragedy too must ultimately bring pleasure. This pleasure is achieved however, only after the spectator has suffered during the course of witnessing the tragedy' (NurulFarhana 15). Vidya also gets pleasure when she has seen the suffering of her opponent person. Freud gives idea of this pleasure principle. Freud contends is made by the ego in surrendering to the reality principle: a momentary unpleasure is tolerated in order to gain an assured pleasure at a later time (Sigmund 41). According to Freud ego refers to the conscious part of our mind and the most aware part.

Vidya's ego knows that in reality she has to face many obstacles to achieve her goal and it is momentary unpleasure that she has tolerated by controlling her grief, emotion, and agony of losing her the dearest husband. All pain and agony she tolerates due to achieve an assured pleasure at a later time and her grief for her husband and her agony those she has to tolerate to reach her success. Pleasure also connects with the self and the identity. Elliott represents this concept using Freudian terminology: "In psychoanalytic terms, the self is not a stable or unified entity. Rather, the human subject is constituted to its roots through the representational dynamics of desire itself ... we cannot really speak of the self outside desire, fantasy, sexuality, and ... identification ..." (Elliott 2). Freudian theory mentions three parts in human mind: id, ego and superego. The ego is as connector between the desires of the id and external reality that represents the core of the formation of selfhood within the individual. Later Lacan reviews Freud's theory of the ego and attempts reformulation of the concept of ego with via identity formation. "Because the ego is formed from the outside world, individuals depend on one another

for "self validation throughout life ... This means that no person's ego is ever whole or autonomous" (Ragland 19). For Lacan individual identity depends on external reality, specifically as defined in the order of language. Freud's concept of getting 'pleasure' after taking revenge of a revenger is also relevant in Hindi commercial films *Hate Story* and *Hate Story 2*. Then the popular Indian commercial thriller films Vivek Agnihotri's *Hate Story* (2012) and Vishal Pandya's *Hate Story 2* (2014) deal with similar female characters named Kavya and Sonika. They both are the revenger. Kavya fights and takes revenge upon a man who betrayed and tortured her physically and mentally. Sonika is another female character who vows to vengeance upon Mandar for murdering Aksay and for herself. Like Vidya, Kavya and Sonika are determined, intelligent. But both characters are tortured physically and mentally by men that Vidya does get or face this type of act anytime. According to Freud, character surrenders to the reality principle: temporary unpleasure in order to get assured pleasure at a time. Kavya and Sonika face many distress and agony to take their revenge but they do not face it out. They do not use pregnancy that is one of the major vulnerabilities of women. However, Vidya uses this vulnerability strategically as her weapon. Since, Vidya is seven months pregnant woman and she has a huge belly. Most of the people around her and characters in this film look at her adversely that refers to any pregnant woman like Vidya, she is not allowed to follow the release of around in this society. If any pregnant woman goes out from her home for doing her work, most of the time she is regarded as object of the male. This making of objectification by the male is named as 'male gaze' according to Laura Mulvey.

According to the film, though Vidya is a pregnant woman, Rana looks at her passionately and falls in love with her. Even though, when she enters in to the guest house men look at her appearance and beauty. When she goes out, pedestrians also gaze on her. This idea of 'male gaze' comes from Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In her essay she asserts, 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive/ female. The determining male

gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure... Traditional role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual... they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness". But Vidya does not count it out and refocus on her own deeds.

Before going to analysis Vidya's vulnerability and her use of this as a weapon, this paper defines what vulnerability is. In this context, vulnerability refers to that there is patriarchal falsehood, women are biologically inferior and therefore men use the word 'vulnerable' to promote that. But the reality is that women are not biologically inferior, nor inherently vulnerable. Rather men think that and they are domineering on them, women are not inherently vulnerable. In this film, Vidya promote this concept that women are not inherently vulnerable rather they are strong enough even at the time of their pregnancy. But her promotion of this concept is not so much relevant because actually she is not pregnant and she uses this only for relishing the benefits. She gives dust in the eyes of patriarchal society becoming as a pregnant woman for taking her revenge. So, in this paper has already been discussed about the definition of tragedy and about Elizabethan era's revenge plays.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* are about the politics of revenge that how the protagonists take revenge for their dearest one. Sujoy Ghosh's film *Kahaani* follows more or less Elizabethan era characters' how they take revenge and the politics of it. Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic approach of taking revenge has been applied of the protagonist of this film whose name is Vidya.

Conclusion

This research identifies the psychological stances of Vidya's ways of directing revenge and shows of her getting pleasure after taking blood vengeance of her opponent. It also gives us theoretical reading of how pleasure operates after encountering revenge. . Female characters in commercial Hindi films are no more use only for the objectification rather they prove themselves as a leading character by their performance. Female vulnerability as we have seen in the film is not

always a weak side for the female. The concept of female vulnerability has been fabricated by the society and women are not inherently vulnerable.

References

1. Barton, Charles K.B. *Getting Even: Revenge as a Form of Justice* (Chicago and La Salle, 1999), pp. 25–6, 78–82; cf. J. Kleinig, *Punishment and Desert* (The Hague, 1973), p. 39. Print.
2. Elliott, Anthony. *Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. - - - *Psychoanalytic Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. Print.
3. Freud, Sigmund. "Formulation of Two Principles". Trans. James Straechy. In *The Penguin Freud Library* Volume 11:35- 44. 1911.
4. Ghosh, Sujoy, director. *Kahaani*. Pen India Pvt. Ltd. 2012.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kahaani>.
6. Abdullah, NurulFarhana. "Revenge Tragedy and Identity"
7. R. Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford, 1981), p. 367. Print.
8. Rosebury, Brian. *Private Revenge and its Relation to Punishment*. *Utilitas*, 21(01). pp. 1-21, 2009. Print.
9. Ragland, Ellie. *Essays on the Pleasures of Death*. London: Routledge. 1995. Print.
10. Uniacke, Suzaane. 'Why is Revenge Wrong?', pp. 61–9.