

Chapter 2

Locating women's cinema

2.1 Mapping the history of cinema:

In his book *How to Read a Film*, distinguishing between the use of the words, cinema, film and movie, James Monaco, writes that “the filmic, is that aspect of the art of filmmaking which is concerned with the world around it while the cinematic deals more specifically with aesthetics and internal structure of the art....while the word ‘movie’ stresses the existence of this form as an economic commodity” (Monaco 2000: 228). The French theorists made a distinction between film and cinema. In *French Film Theory and Criticism: 1907-1929*, Richard Abel writes about the cinematic culture that was developing during the early days of film making. A reading through the book gives us an idea that the word ‘cinema’ is being used to refer to the idea of ‘industrial and institutional aspects’ of film making (Kuhn and Westwell 2012: 75) and the word film refer to the piece of art that is produced (Abel 1993:4). While describing about the intellectual duel about the similarity and difference of cinema and theatre in France during the initial days of cinema, Abel’s use of the word ‘cinema’ refers to the use of the word as an indication to the industry that produces ‘films’. Abel further writes about the early scholars’ view of cinema as a new form of theatre,

....and they accepted the idea that, as in the theatre, the dramatist or scenario writer was the real author of the film... (1993: 19).

Thus, films in the early period were viewed as a technical variation of theatre aided by new technologies. Before we move on to the central issue of women’s cinema, it is imperative that we locate ourselves in history with a brief detour through the history of the film form.

Films with the initial use of the stationary camera (Grainge et al., 2007: 7) gave the image of a medium that was passive and indiscriminate. On the other hand, with the use of editing, films became a medium that that could juxtapose and

render many images at once. The finished fine product thus brought films nearer to all forms of art (Prinz 2007: 1-2). The development of cinema as popular art and its capacity to incorporate many complex genres also points towards its development like novels. Films like novels developed 'through an early stage marked by invention and freshness and soon reached a commanding position in which it dominated other arts' (Monaco, 2000:229).

All histories of films, however, are broadly speaking, divisible into two eras — the silent and the sound periods. Various factors influenced the development of film in its early period. The development of film is marked by the development of all the predecessors of the Cinematographe. Films were also influenced by other contemporary art forms such as the Victorian melodrama or the principles of the photography. Between the years 1896-1912 films evolved from a side show stunt to feature length films. The years from 1912 to 1927 mark the era of the silent feature films. The period from 1932 to 1946 was the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood, earning unprecedented economic success (Monaco 2000: 232; Grainge et al., 2007; Nelmes, 2012; Bordwell and Thompson, 2003).

Films depended on a whole series of small inventions, each attributable to a different inventor. In the US, Thomas Alva Edison invented the 'kinetoscope' but considered movies more as an instrument of private viewing (than public consumption). The kinestoscope was up for large scale manufacture in the 1890s and became a regular feature in side shows and carnivals. One of the very first moving pictures that were demonstrated was the famous *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (1894). In England, Frenchmen Louis Auguste Le Prince and Englishman William Friese-Green came up with a workable and movable camera projection system in the late 1880s, but the device failed to generate much attention. In France, Louis and Auguste Lumiere developed their own device and started its production in December 1895 in the basement of Grand Café. They organized their first paid show for the audience at 14 Boulevard, Paris and continued exhibition of their 'Lumiere Cinematographe' in major European cities. In the year 1895, Thomas Armat in America came up with another device but sold it to Thomas Edison. Edison organized the first formal public screening of the movies

in April 1896 at Koster and Bail's Music Hall in the 34th Street and Sixth Avenue in New York.

It was however, the Lumieres who were the first to organize public viewing of the moving pictures, fascinating people with their invention and taking it across borders (Grainge et al., 2007: 5-6). In 1896 and 1897 the use of Cinematograph and kinetograph spread widely and companies like Biograph and Vitagraph came up. In France, George Melies, a stage magician, saw the illusory power of the medium and ventured into the process of filmmaking to create some of the greatest magical moments in the history of films. By 1905 the concept of film theatre was established after the Lumieres had opened the first movie viewing establishment in 1897. In 1902 Thomas L Tally's Electric Theatre opened the first American film theatre and by 1908 there were more than five thousand Nickelodeons across the United States.

The Italian and French filmmakers' 'feature film' was introduced to America by the independent filmmakers; a form that was later improved by D W Griffith. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) tasted unprecedented financial success giving birth to the concept of 'blockbuster' where money is invested in huge sum in a film expecting alluring returns (Monaco 2000, 236). By the late 19th century film viewing became a popular source of entertainment in Europe and America (Grainge et al., 2007: 9).

The cinema of the period from the mid-1890s to the mid-1910s, is also sometimes termed as 'pre Hollywood' cinema, in reference to the developing dominance of the American film industry during the period after World War-I. Cinema during that period has also been called pre-classical cinema alluding to the standard rules of classical narratives that was to dictate filmmaking conventions from the 1920s onwards. The growth and expansion in filmmaking trends that took place during 1906-1907 can be perceived as setting the groundwork for the kind of cinema or film industry system that would be known as the 'Hollywood system', to be used in both in official connotation as well as a reference within the film industry (Pearson 1996: 32).

As American films steeped in popularity, there were also rise in audiences demanding for films that were artistically diverse and experimental, or that dealt with issues of the real world. Thus there was a merge of political ideologies and filmmaking trends like the links formed between the artistic avant-garde and with other political alliances, particularly the left. Aesthetic movements in cinema started drawing parallels from those that of other arts forms. While cinema mostly came in second to other artistic movements, in the Soviet Union it was the front runner in artistic expansion and expression (Monaco 2000; 399; Grainge et al., 2007; Nelmes, 2012; Bordwell and Thompson, 2003). Cinema emerged as a medium that incorporated into it the fine nuances of painting, dance, music, poetry, architecture as well as sculpture. This feature of cinema prompted Italian film theorist Ricciotto Canudo to call cinema the 'seventh art' (Merjian 2009: 226-228).

After the World War II, films began to face challenge from television. It was during this period that cultural exchanges between countries increased. The period during 1947 to 1959 was when films from other parts of the world also got exposure and Hollywood was no longer considered the sole authority in artistic production of films. The growth of the New Wave in France in the early sixties beckoned a new beginning in the process of filmmaking. Filmmaking trends also underwent considerable changes during 1960-80 with new technologies coming to the aid of the process. The new developments were also aided by the changing dynamics in various socio-political and economic factors that influenced the process of filmmaking. Filmmaking thus dealt with various trajectories like dramas portraying the fantasies and struggle of the middle-class in India and existential questions being asked in European films. The 1980 also marked the end of the New Wave to herald a new era, - 'the postmodern'. Films were now seen as part of varied scope of entertainment and communication media that came to be dominated by television. In the process, films also lost some of the earlier the economic leverage that it had.

Today, films are cherished as popular form of entertainment having its own grammar and aesthetic concerns. But films also need to studied and understood in the broader context of all other media and art forms dealing with sound,

pictures and videos. Theatrical feature film making is simply one of the many facets in the world of multiple forms of media (Monaco 2000, 284; Grainge et al., 2007; Nelmes, 2012; Bordwell and Thompson, 2003).

Film history has been influenced by the dynamics of various social, political, economic, cultural, psychological and aesthetic factors. These factors have influenced filmmaking process, without however one overpowering the other. If films are to be seen as commercial product, there are also some filmmakers who have successfully made films without placing much emphasis on the underlying forces of the market. On a similar note, certain films that might attract attention for their social and political statements may be just a reflection of the personal taste and influences of the filmmaker. Thus, rather than emphasizing on the casual relations of various factors in films, a reading of the relations of films with other events and phenomena would be beneficial (Monaco 2000: 231). According to Monaco it would be useful to first look at the 'economic and technological' basis of the medium and then study the 'political, social and psychological implications of the art' (ibid.).

The early films borrowed heavily from the existing standards and rules of photography and theatre. The current cinematic standards and distinctive narrative strategies are a result of the continuing course of advancement of the filmmaking process. The arrival of the film director also brought in some changes in the film texts in addition to the developments in the process of production. The early filmmakers set the camera at a considerable distance from the scene of action to show the entire length and breadth of the frame. Thus, the human body would be captured in full length with spaces above the head as well as below the feet. The shots were taken from a stationary camera which was moved only to re-frame a following action. The intervention of editing or lighting was little. This long-shot style in early films is often referred to as a 'tableau shot or a proscenium arch shot' (Smith 1996: 34). These early filmmakers were also called more theatrical than cinematic². Narratives that

² During the early days of film making the static camera was used to show the full set and the actors as the scene was more an individual shot rather than a series of connected shots. Films were inspired by other forms of visual media such as postcards, stereographs and the theatre. The appeal of these films was based on visual spectacle, which Tom Gunning has called 'cinema of attractions'—

were built through a collection of shots and the play of time and space in the visuals were hardly relied on. The use of the static and long shots led to the development of films more as a visual spectacle than a device of story-telling, which Tom Gunning has termed as 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning 2006: 382).

The Lumière did not depict any fascinating events in their moving pictures. They rather captured insignificant and incidental events that the present day audience might not even notice in a film. The early film audiences did not demand captivating narratives or spectacles. They were enticed by just the recording and reproduction of the animated movements projected on the screen.

Unlike the Lumieres, Georges Melies saw the power of this visual medium and shot in his studio, where he shot elaborately staged scenes and created many memorable moments in film history. The magical appearances and disappearances of characters and objects were achieved through 'stop action'. Melies's films have always been a favourite for debate among film critics arguing over the supposed theatrical style of early cinema (Grainge et al, 2007; Gunning 2006). While it was believed that stop action required no editing and Melies's films were simply 'film theatre', it was later revealed that splicing and editing techniques were generously used by him in the films to produce the magical effect. Images were also manipulated through the superimposition of one shot over another. Films such as *L'Homme orchestre (The One Man Band, 1900)* or *Le Mélomane (The Melomaniac, 1903)* stand as examples of Melies's cinematic manipulation of the images achieved through by layering of one shot over another.

Despite the use of varied cinematic techniques, Melies's films in many ways were theatrical and presented a story as if it were being performed on a stage similar (Smith 1996: 39). Melies's films not only replicate the proscenium arch

films less dependent on the cinematic way of storytelling but more on visual and narrative conventions. Georges Melies's films are a case in point; they bear proximity to the form of theatre. The cinematic is thus the variation of shots, cuts and editing, whereas the theatrical is the staged visual spectacle of sets, props and costumes. Theatrical films would encourage the actors to establish contact with the spectators by directly glancing at the camera (Grainge et al, 2007; Gunning2000).

perspective, but stage the action in a space between the painted backgrounds and the front side of the stage where the characters enter or exit either from the wings or through the traps. Film theorists have pointed to the differences in the filming of events by Lumiere and Melies as the originating moment of distinction between documentary and fiction film-making. While that the Lumieres filmed 'real' events and Melies 'staged' events for the camera and that narrated different stories. These distinctions nevertheless do not hold good in the present context and contemporary discourse as most of the pre-1907 moving pictures is an amalgamation of the present times 'documentary' and 'fictional' form. Melies was perhaps the first to make an attempt to direct a film. The emergence of the film director was followed by arrival of other specialists, such as script-writers, property men, and wardrobe mistresses, who worked under his/her direction. The American studios employed several directors and provided them with a cast and crew, with the aim of churning as many films as possible. This commercial intent led to the emergence of the film producer, who would oversee the whole process of filmmaking.

Around 1907, critics deliberated upon narrative clarity in films. Films drifted between emphasizing on visual pleasure, 'the cinema of attractions' and story-telling, 'the cinema of narrative integration' (Smith 1996: 49). Between 1907-08 and 1917 the narrative became of prime importance with other elements like lighting, composition, editing being used to help the audience follow a story. Essential to the stories were the characters that were created through performance, style, editing and dialogues. There brought in realistic feelings to the story and were also in linking shots and scenes. By 1911 the camera moved closer, narrowing the frame and producing the three-quarter shot. The decreased distance between the camera and the actor accentuated their individualized characters and facial expressions thus giving rise to the star system. The ultimate embodiment of glamour that there has ever been, is the Hollywood film star. In the period in which the major studios established their dominance over the filmmaking world, none was more refined, polished, packaged and presented than the men and women in the films who became the appeal in the efforts to entice the public.

2.1.1 The Indian scenario:

India had her tryst with motion pictures in 1896 when Lumiere operator Maurice Sestier in Bombay presented to an English speaking audience and Westernized Indians the reels of the first film ever shot: *The Arrival of a Train at the Ciotat Station* (1896). Soon the travelling shows started including films from the Lumiere company in their programs and were hugely popular. Films soon spread to Calcutta and Madras and by 1898, Calcutta had its own cinema hall. Movies like *The Races in Poona* and *A Train Entering the Station in Bombay* were some of the earliest Indian productions in motion picture dating back to 1897-98. But these were mainly shot by Europeans. Sakharam Bhatvadekar was the first Indian to shoot a news reel in 1901. Nationalist sentiments influenced Indian cinema from its very inception and Bhatvadekar's news reel *The Return of Wrangler Paranjpye to India* (1901) is an example of this.

Popularity of cinema in India is indebted to the travelling operators or projectors. Fairs and religious festivals were the events where movies were screened for the people. They had to fight many difficulties travelling with tents, seats and other equipment in bullock carts to show the movies to the people. (Thoraval 2000: 3). One such travelling operator was Abdulally Esoofally who later teamed-up with Ardeshir Irani to establish the Imperial Film Company. Esoofally also set up the Majestic Theatre that premiered India's first talkie *Alam Ara*. Jamshedji Framji Madan, a prosperous Parsi descendent established the first Indian cinema hall 'Elphinstone Picture Palace'. By 1909 there were more than 30 cinema halls all over India. In those early days of cinema (1904-05) many films were imported from other parts of the world of which a large share was of American films apart from other European films including those that of Melies's. At least 80 per cent of films shown in the late 1920s in India were American despite the fact that a considerable number of local studios churned indigenous films (Smith 1996: 95-96). But the themes of the imported films were alien to the Indian audience.

The Indian filmmakers thus focused on themes relating to the Indian culture, tradition, history and heritage that the film goers could easily identify with. The

traditional arts, music, song, dance, epic, folklores, legends and popular theatre has influenced Indian cinema since its very beginning (Thoraval 2000: 16). Thus, the first filmed play *Pundalik* (1912) as well as the first feature film of India *Raja Harischandra* (1913) was based on the religious tradition of the nation. *Pundalik* was made by three lovers of Marathi cinema – Nanabhai Govind Chitre, Ram Chandra Gopal Torney and PR Tipnis. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke or Dadasaheb Phalke was a Marathi Brahmin who believed that Indian Cinema should be made for and by Indians. Indian Cinema for him should be a showcase of Indian culture and tradition. He was technically and politically aware and a fervent supporter of the nationalist and *swadeshi* movement. Phalke was well versed in Sanskrit and Indian classical art and architecture. His *Raja Harischandra* ushered in the genre of mythological films in India. The religious themes continued to be used by filmmakers to ignite nationalistic fervour amongst the people. Another filmmaker to carve a niche for himself was Baburao Painter who founded the Maharashtra Film Company in the year 1917 in Kolhapur. He is often credited with making the first large scale historical film of Indian Cinema, *Sinhagad* (1923) based on the life of the Maratha king and hero Shivaji.

While Maharashtra showed the way in film making, Bengal was not too far behind. The first Bengali film was a remake of Phalke's *Raja Harischandra*. This film, directed by Rustomji Dotiwala, was titled *Satyavadi Raja Harischandra* and made in the year 1917. In the year 1918 another Bengali film was made by Ram Patankar titled *Ram Vanvas*. In the same year Dhiren Ganguly with some associates established the Indo-British Film Company. He also wrote and acted in what can probably be called the first Indian social satire – *Bilet Pherat* in 1921 directed by Nitish C Lahiri.

In the south of India, Nataraja Mudaliar directed the first Tamil film *Keechakavatham* in 1916-17. Mudaliar made a total of seven feature films. Another filmmaker from South India, Raghupathi Surya Prakash made a number of films during the early decade of film making in South India. His *Bhishma Pratigani* (1921) was a huge success.

Films in India started flourishing and the silent era saw the rise of an industry that was to grow to be the largest producer of films in the world. During the years 1926-27 almost 100 films were made in India. Cinema in India moved from the mythological themes and touched varied subjects. During 1929-30 there were 27 films on social themes, 33 based on history, 14 based on Mughal themes, comedies and action alongside the hugely popular mythologicals.

The Indian film industry did not remain alien to the development of sound in films for very long. Four years after the Hollywood production *Jazz Singer* (1927) made ripples in film industries all over the world, Ardeshir Irani made India's first talkie *Alam Ara* in 1931. Silent films continued to thrive in India till 1934.

The growth and popularity of the film industry in India also attracted the attention of the colonizers. In order to 'preserve morality in cinema' and 'shield negative Western influences specially American', Indian Cinematographic Act was brought into force in 1918 with amendments in 1919 and 1920 heralding the beginning of film censorship in India. The censorship laws also served to suppress the nationalist sentiments that had started to be reflected in the films.

However, this move of the colonial regime may have found some counter actions in the projection of the Indian myths and mythologies. Dadasaheb Phalke is said to have been inspired to bring the Hindu Gods and Goddesses on screen after having watched *The Life of Christ* (1906), a move that may be equated with the nationalist sentiments of boycotting foreign goods (Grant 2006: 13-14). Ashish Rajadhyaksha quotes Phalke in *Oxford History of World Cinema*, "My films are Swadeshi in the sense that the capital, ownership, employees and stories are Swadeshi.....While *The Life of Christ* was rolling fast before my eyes I was mentally visualizing the Gods, Shri Krishna, Shri Ramchandra, their Gokul and Ayodhya..." (Rajadhyaksha 1997:402). Following, Phalke many films based on the indigenous myths and legends were made. *Bhakta Vidur* (1921), a myth adapted from the Mahabharata evoked the image of Mahatma Gandhi, in the thinly clad character of Vidur (ibid. 403). Baburao Painter's mythological and historical films were able to capture the attention of

the nationalist leaders and he was dubbed 'Cinema Kesari' by Bal Gangadhar Tilak (ibid. 403). The early Indian filmmakers also voiced the need for various reforms and changes that was called for by the nationalist leaders in the films such as *Achyut Kanya* (1936) and *Duniya Na Mane* (1937). While Gandhi himself was not an admirer of the medium of cinema, other nationalist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel remained far from being critical about cinema and the efforts of the early Indian filmmakers. Nehru sent his best wishes to the Indian Motion Pictures Congress held in Bombay in 1939 and Patel recorded a speech about evils of alcoholism for the film *Brandichi Batli/ Brandy Ki Botal* (1939) (Sharma 2014).

As is evident from the works of the early directors, Indian cinema depended heavily on the local literatures, epics, legends, folklore etc. Though not alienated from global filmmaking trends, Indian cinema has been able to maintain its unique identity in thematic and structural pattern resisting pressures of cultural imperialism especially from Hollywood. From its inception Indian cinema has drawn inspiration from the styles, aesthetics and semiotics of the large variety of cultural forms that the Indian civilization has adorned through centuries. The classical traditions from the epics, Sanskrit drama, music, dance has shaped the thoughts and imaginations of millions of Indians and also the Indian cinematic traditions.

Jawaharlal Handoo has pointed that myth and folklore have always been integral parts of Indian cinema and have survived in changed forms. He has pointed out four categories in Indian cinema that is influenced by folklores—*full myth* films are those where traditional myths or folktales or their national or regional character do not change the basic plot structure. *Half myths* are where myth or the traditional narrative, imposed on a non-traditional plot-structure or vice-versa. *Mythic theme films* borrow from one or many mythic motifs and use them according to the needs of the plot-structure, which otherwise is completely non-mythic and modern. *The fairy tale patterns* are those popular films whose plot is comparable to fairy tales (Handoo 1996: 137). The oral traditions have also influenced story telling in Indian cinema. The simplistic

dialogue delivery of Hindi cinema is also an indication of the influence of the oral narrative traditions in Indian cinema.

Andrew Grant writes about Indian cinema's (those produced in Mumbai) romance with the myths, epics, legends and folklores of the nation. Grant writes, "Bollywood cinema has repeatedly dipped into its vast archive of mythological epics, legends and fairy tales as source material for films." The religious and epic themes are plots Indian films have explored since the days of its inception to the present. From *Raja Harishchandra* to the recent animated films based on the tales of Hanuman, Lord Ganesh, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. are based on the content from the epics and Indian religious tradition. There are also films like *Paheli* (2005) celebrating the rich tradition of folklore in Indian cinema. Apart from the obvious use of these themes in the script of the film, Indian cinema has made subtle use of it in narrating the story. Through song, dance, dialogue, costume, set etc. cinema in India often refers to the rich folk tradition that is spread across the nation. The tales of the Panchatantra, Hitopadesda, Jataka etc. are quoted in Indian films. The presence of these themes makes critics of Indian cinema label it as crude, unsophisticated, redundant and formula based. But cinema in India, like its Western counterpart, derived its inspiration from the existent traditions prior to cinema. Movements like realism in theatre reached much after cinema was introduced in India. Indian cinema drew heavily from traditional theatrical forms and musicals for its theme and plot (Booth 1995: 172). Booth attributes the popularity of Indian cinema to the use of the traditional elements in its content and narrative structure (ibid.). Booth, in fact, writes:

One can see similar intertextual connections between traditional epics and the Hindi cinema. The epic content in Hindi films, however, usually forms a secondary or allusory subtext rather than the primary text. With the exception of the early mythological genres that overtly recounted epic stories, most Hindi film plots are not explicitly "about" Arjuna, Alha or any other epic hero. (ibid. 173).

Indian cinema has portrayed myriad human emotions in its narratives. The various *bhavas* and *rasas* as mentioned in the ancient cultural texts find eloquent execution in Indian cinema (ibid. 175).

Apart from the obvious traditional content, the filmmakers also used the medium as a platform to help the Indian nationalist movement. Films like *Udaykaal* (1930) and *Bhakt Vidur* are believed to have augmented the nationalist sentiments during the freedom struggle. *Udaykaal*, a film about Shivaji had V Shanatram playing the lead role, attracted the attention of the colonial rulers who sensed it as an attempt to disguise modern day feelings of patriotism with a historical theme. The film was banned and no amount of revision could salvage it. *Bhakt Vidur* also met the same fate as it was felt that Vidur was modeled on Mahatma Gandhi and had dialogues steeped in patriotic fervour (Narwekar 2013: 1).

Films continued to be reminiscent of the freedom struggle in the post-independence phase. The 1948 film *Shaheed* was a passionate portrayal of the Quit India movement and the consequent violence for the sake of Independence (Narwekar 2013: 1). The goal of nation building found profound space in the Indian cinema. Films like *Mother India* (1957), *Naya Daur* (1957), *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953) etc. were all about the post-independence period and dilemmas of development and nation building that infested the nation. Sumita S Chakravarty writes, “Mother India evokes the myth of a powerful nation through its central metaphor.....[I]t shapes a fundamental level of Indian experience of suffering into stuff of myth, investing the everyday with heroic, allowing its audiences to renew their most cherished cultural assumptions. The chronicle of one woman’s struggle against the oppressions of both man and nature become an unconscious encapsulation of India’s long history of domination by foreign powers and its struggle to maintain the integrity of its soil. The film embodies an idealization of the Indian peasants’ will to survive against overwhelming odds” (Chakravarty 1993:149-150). Bimal Roy’s *Do Bigha Zamin* is about the ambivalence of the fifties towards the large scale industrialization effort made by the government. It is also a vivid portrayal of the new Indian cities with all the fine things for some and other sleeping on the pavements (Chakravarty 1993: 94). *Naya Daur* reflects a dilemma similar to the tone of *Do Bigha Zamin*, reflects the dilemmas of approaching industrialization and keeping the traditional occupations. The trend has not ceased and Indian cinema continues

to be a reflection and an inspiration for a developing and changing society and nation. Films like *Border (1997)*, *Aarakshan (2011)*, *Swades (2004)*, *Rajneeti (2010)* etc. have dealt with the problems the new India is facing at its borders, with its society and politics. Films like *The Rising: The Ballad of Mangal Pandey (2005)*, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh (2002)*, *Lagaan (2001)*, *The Making of the Mahatma (1996)* etc. have reprised the history, legends and tales of the freedom movement for the contemporary viewers

These films bear witness that Indian cinema has been able to connect to its roots of culture, tradition and history in its narrative. Though cinema as an art was developed in the West, like in all other parts of the world, it has developed its unique identity in India too. All these elements of localization along with technological developments, cinema in India took the shape of a huge industry now not only churning jobs for many but also adding to the national income. Indian film industry is today the producer of the largest number of films in the world. According to FICCI-KPMG Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2012, the Indian film industry was estimated to be valued at 93 billion rupees. The study projects the industry to grow to 150 billion rupees by 2016. This commercial expansion of Indian Cinema demands huge money. India remains the world's largest film consuming market and attracts interest from financial and strategic investors. Though Indian film industry is still to be dominated by the Hollywood like studio system, big media houses have large share in the investments made in the film industry. *Big Pictures* of Reliance and Kumar Mangalam Birla's 27.5% stake at Living Media Group are recent examples of industrial houses investing in film making in India. In 2011 Providence Equity Partners invested 58.5 million US dollars in UFO Moviez India Limited giving UFO Moviez India Limited a majority stake in Scrabble Entertainment to globally expand its business of digitizing screens.

In the early years, however moving pictures were not a big business. Nonetheless, movies as well as photography being an expensive art, was mostly confined to the wealthy and the western educated classes. Hiralal Sen, the pioneer of cinema in Bengal and Dada Saheb Phalke, the maker of *Raja Harishchandra* were men with a steady income. Movies in the early days were

able to capture the imagination of the wealthy business class. People like JF Madan and Abdulally Esoofally, both wealthy Parsi businessmen, invested money not only in building film studios but also in producing them. Esoofally's Magestic Theatre screened India's first talkie *Alam Ara* in 1931. JF Madan not only founded the Elphinstone Bioscope Company in Calcutta in 1902 but also produced the Bengali film *Satyavadi Raja Harischandra* in 1917. It was contribution from all section of the society that gave the Indian film industry its present glory. Artists, businessmen, government all contributed towards the success of the film industry in India. National Film Development Corporation and Films Division of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, have supported the production of many quality feature films and documentaries in the country.

Meanwhile, filmmaking in Assam took some time to take off. While artists and professionals in Maharashtra, Bengal and the Southern part of the country began actively exploring the new mass medium right from the silent era, it was only in 1935 that the Assamese audience had their first viewing of a film made in their native tongue. Though Pramathesh Chandra Barua was the first Assamese to join the adventures of cinema he did not make any films in Assamese. Barua was exposed to Bengali and Hindi cinema and went on to direct Charat Chandra's *Devdas* in both the languages and his film has remained a masterpiece till date.

It was poet, lyricist, litterateur and freedom fighter Jyoti Prasad Agarwala who introduced filmmaking to the people of Assam. Agarwala, son of a wealthy business man went to Calcutta for his college studies but soon left it mid-way to travel to England in 1926 and joined Edinburg University. Agarwala again left his studies half-way and travelled to Germany. He then got an entry into the UFA studios, where for seven months he learnt the art and science of movie making. It was in Germany that Agarwala also came in contact with stalwart of Indian cinema, Himanshu Roy. While in Germany, Agarwala was exposed to the legends like Griffith, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Pabst, Chaplin, Karl Dreyer, Munrau and Stronhein (Sarma 2005: 20). Aparna Sharma, a researcher from California University researching on Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, during her visit to Tezpur University mentioned that the filmmaker was in fact heavily influenced by

Sergei Eisenstein. Traces of Eisenstein can be seen in the editing techniques of Agarwala's *Joymoti* (1935) that according to her was much more technically and artistically advanced than most films made in India during that time (Sharma: 2012). His cinematic techniques involved a generous mixture of varying shots. The style of using dominant long shots found a healthy break in *Joymoti*. He also gave Assamese cinema its first actress in the form of Aideu Handique. Handique overcame her initial hesitations and dared social taboos associated with acting in cinema to create a history and legacy of her own. She has been an inspiration to all generations of actors of Assamese cinema.

After Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Assamese cinema and its makers lacked the finesse and deep understanding of the complex art. It was in the joint effort of Phani Sharma and Bishnu Prasad Rabha that *Siraj* came up as strong socially relevant and well-made film (Borpujari 2008: 3-10). The tradition of artistic and tasteful cinema imbued with socially relevant themes has been seen in the films of Lakhyadhar Choudhury, Dr Bhupen Hazarika, Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Padum Barua, Nip Barua, Jahnu Barua, Gautam Bora, Sanjib Hazarika, Manju Borah, Santwana Bordoloi etc. While the Assamese film industry has not been as prolific as the Hindi, Bengali or South film industry, it has seen women directors contribute towards its advancement.

It would be probably safe to claim that Indian cinema, in its early years, did not reveal any overt political agenda other than that of nationalism. Women's issues and women's concerns do not figure prominently in the films of these times (Singh 2007: 18-19). However, this was also an age in which a few women filmmakers could carve a space for themselves in the world of Indian cinema.

2.2 Women's cinema:

In Hollywood, as the star system took over films, the concerns of the gender emerged and their representation on screen became a matter to be critically analyzed. Hollywood film stars became god-like figures not descending from the heavens but manufactured commodities in the studios. Edgar Morin called the star a total item of merchandise whose every inch of the body, every shred of the soul, every memory is thrown into the market (Morin 1960: 137). The

images of the star guarantee certain economic returns for the film. They become the source of revenue by guaranteeing ‘certain pleasures and functioning as a commercial strategy’ (Watson 2012: 168). The stars, that are also a production of the consumer culture in cinema, are used for their appeal to a certain section of film going public. It is their charisma (their natural talent) that is fused with their image to relate to certain social issues or dilemmas (Hollows et al 2000: 114). Marilyn Monroe is considered the most marketable star and she became an image of desirable female sexuality. Monroe was the image of the female that was both innocent and sensual—features that had been seen as contradictions. The acceptability of Monroe’s sexuality came from the fact that her innocence masked the perceived threat of her sexuality to men (Hollows et al 2000: 114).

In contrast to Monroe was Asta Nielsen, who was perhaps the first to get the taste of stardom at an international level. The *Oxford History of World Cinema* describes, “Nielsen's sensuality is matched by her intelligence, resourcefulness and a boyish physical agility. Her expressive face and body seem immediate and modern, especially when compared with the exaggerated gestures that were common in early cinema. Her powerful, slim figure and large, dark eyes, set off by dramatic, suggestive costumes, allowed her to cross class and even gender lines convincingly” (Smith 1996: 52). In the mid-twenties it was Greta Garbo who ruled the screen and who was transformed into an image of graceful eroticism. The use of subtle, romantic lighting, rich in expressive half-tones was used to enrich her screen image (Smith 1996: 334).

Although several early stars were packaged as thrilling or unique personalities, the star as a magnificent image of the common man/woman emerged during the 1930s. Among the many and varied appeals that Hollywood cinema developed in its golden age, one strategic idea that it floated was that anybody could become a star. MGM pictures with their passion for well packaged glossed picture, had actors looking as perfect as a marble statues stressing excessively looks, facial features and body shape³. Movie stars had become the main object

³ The Hollywood photographers with the combination of lights, props, camera, costumes and make-up created ‘idealised’ images of beauty almost equating celestial goodness that was far from the dull and uninteresting mundane reality (Elvehjem Museum of Art 1987). Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) was the largest and most successful of all the studios till the 1950s. MGM with its vast resources

of Hollywood fantasy. Stars were presented to the public mainly as objects of sexual desire. To achieve this end, film companies borrowed from the culture of sexual representation that had developed in the theatres of Europe and the United States. The development of cinema provided male producers and artists with new possibilities for shaping women and producing fantastical figures to the point of redefining prevalent tenants of femininity (Gundle 2008: 172-182).

The flawlessness beauty of stars was intended at communicating seductive appeal; a trait that would make them more consumable for the viewer. The rise Hollywood cinema can be alluded to its skillful and 'satisfying' offering of visual pleasure. Its dominance remained unchallenged as mainstream film came to be infused with the erotic depicted in the language and form of patriarchy. Scopophilic pleasure became the central element of films. Cinema symbolizes and fulfills two types of scopophilic pleasures- fetishistic and voyeuristic. Women then become the object of spectacle the role of women in the narrative is to act as the system of support for the hero to achieve his goals⁴ (Mulvey 1989: 19). According to Claire Johnston the female character functions as a sign that is merely the representation of the ideological concept 'woman' has for men. In fact, woman is 'not-man' in classical Hollywood cinema having no meaning in their own right and no subject-position (Hoofd: 1996).

Femininity [...] is often considered to be a masquerade, the construction of an image that matches cultural expectations. As Jeanine Basinger (1993: 129) observes, 'a woman is her fashion and glamour, rather than her work'. (ibid.).

Female stardom has been an essential component in the rise of the film industry and many of these women were celebrated more for their appearances than for their acting ability. Even the roles that they were offered were not above traditional stereotypes of gender.

added glitz to its productions. It was MGM that more than other studios was responsible for corporatization of glamour. MGM moulded and groomed the stars that would appeal to the audiences (Gundle and Castelli 2006).

⁴ Mulvey talks about two elements of the film form – the narrative and the spectacle. Cinema invokes scopophilic pleasures where the spectator looks into a private world on to which he can project his fantasies. Female subjectivity is constructed in terms of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' in the film spectacle. Films have both spectacle and narrative. The male characters not only represent the look of the spectator but also have an active role in carrying forward the story i.e. the narrative.

But this has always not been the case. In the initial stages of the evolution of films, women had far more active role to play. The early female film stars were more popular than their male counterparts having greater control over the role that they played as well as the happenings behind the screen. Roles that defied those standard tenets of accepted feminine norms were not rare in the film arena. Female actors could explore the different ways they might be depicted on film. Things changed with the coming of the Hays Production Code in 1934; roles that provided women agency on screen became fewer, a continuing legacy of Hollywood. Gradually, the development of the star system led to many female actors being cast in stereotypical roles. Though apparently many films depicted female liberation, they ultimately worked to reinforce the belief that all working girls eventually settle down and marry.

The largest box office draws in film history, was Mary Pickford who worked in the Biograph studios with D.W. Griffith. She epitomized the 'innocent' girl image. Along with Pickford, Lillian Gish also helped to popularize the image of the 'innocent' heroine. Norma Talmadge, another famous actor in the twenties also became known for the types of roles that Gish had made popular. Their reign was challenged in the mid-twenties by Clara Bow who was not the virginal blond but a 'flapper'. The flapper was a modern, young, urban woman who had a career, socialized and wore short hair and dresses that highlighted her curves and was the antithesis of the Victorian ideal of a quiet, demure woman bound to the home and the domestic ideal (Smith 1996: 78). She was also sexually open, though her new sexuality would end in tragedy if she did not eventually find a husband. While the flapper represented a novel and open portrayal of female sexuality, another female stereotype, the vamp, brought the image of a sexually aggressive woman to the screen. The most famous vamp in the twenties was Theda Bara, boldly exuding sexuality and exoticism on film. The vamp came to take many forms by the 1920s. Actors like Pola Negri and Greta Garbo were the exotic vamps on screen. Around the same time, another image of female sexuality emerged and that was of Jean Harlow, the first 'blonde bombshell'. Jean Harlow represented a different version of female sexuality coloured with

adventure: “Jean Harlow with her platinum hair, low-cut dresses and slinky, purring actions, made [sex] dangerous” (Gundle 2006: 70)

While women portrayed many roles in cinema from the very beginning, it did not take them too long to take up film direction. The French filmmaker Alice Guy Blache is considered to be the first female filmmaker. Her film *The Cabbage Fairy* was made in the year 1896 (the year when India had her first taste of motion pictures). She is in fact hailed as the first filmmaker to attempt at directing a narrative fiction (Butler 2002: 25). Mary G Hurd (2007) writes that Guy Blache’s *The Cabbage Fairy* is also the first fictional film to be made. In 1906 she made a big-budget production titled ‘*The Life of Christ*’. The film went on to inspire many including Dadasaheb Phalke, who thought that Indian religious mythologies could well be the subject matter for films (Thoraval 2000: 12). Blache began her career in France at Gaumont Film Company. She was also the first woman to head a film production company. She founded her film production firm, the Solax Company in 1910.

Alice Guy Blache also mentored Lois Weber, one of the most prominent female American film directors. Weber was equally adept at writing, acting, directing, designing sets and costumes as well as editing and developing negatives. She was one of the first directors to experiment with sound. In 1915 Weber joined the Universal Studios and established Lois Weber Productions in 1917.

By the 1920s movies became big business and most women, other than editors and screenwriters, encountered difficulties in staying in the profession. Rise in cost of production, departmentalization of film making and transition from the silent to sound era also added to the decline of women film directors. The film directors apply their mental and physical labour, which is conceivably the most modern economic activity wherein it is perceived that the success of women in comparison to their male counterparts is less measurable (Bergman 1990: 68). This situation of women in filmmaking is indeed a reflection of the general state of affairs where economic and political activities are considered as male domain. Their value in the working of the socio-political economy is recognized only if they add value to the economic standing of their fathers (or husbands)

(Luedke 2004: 51). This status quo is reflected in the sharing credits for screenwriting, producing and directing by the women professionals with their husbands. Jane Gaines and Radha Vatsal write that fan magazines during the silent era in Hollywood would make special reference to the 'creative teams' pairing the husband and wife (Gaines and Vatsal 2013). Anthony Slide writes about the presence of the husbands of two eminent early women filmmakers Lois Weber and Alice Guy Blache,

Lois Weber's husband, Phillips Smalley, shared credit as director with his wife while contributing little if anything to the creative process. He has no solo directorial credits and ended his days as a minor[.....]While there can be little doubt that he [Herbert Blache] took advantage of his wife's abilities, he was a director in his own right and, perhaps more importantly, he was a good businessman within an industry where a woman perceived as weak could not succeed. (2012: 117)

In the 1930s, when unions and guilds were established in Hollywood it was mostly the male members who occupied premier positions and the women were pushed to the backbenches. But there was one women director who survived the transition from silent to talkie films.

Dorothy Arzner directed four silent and thirteen sound films. She directed films for major production houses like Paramount, MGM and Columbia apart from her independent endeavours (Hurd 2007: 1). Arzner is the example of success and professionalism in the American film industry when presence of women crew in film production was gradually going down as it came under the wing of the studio system (Hurd 2007: 1). Mary G Hurd (2007) writes about Ida Lupino, a film director of Hollywood in the 1950s. Hurd calls her the Dorothy Arzner of the 1950s when filmmaking by women in Hollywood was still not a trend. Ida Lupino not only survived and established her own filmmaking company in the male dominated Hollywood but also in the style of a true auteur, directed as well as wrote or co-wrote the scripts for her films (ibid. 7-8).

Until the 1960s and 1970s women hardly made any impact in the realm of direction. In 1971 it was Elaine May who started to write, direct and perform in her films (ibid. 148). On 13 June 2011, at the screening of *Humoresque* at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Cari Beauchamp announced that

fifty per cent of all silent films were written by women (Slide 2012: 114). In his research, Anthony Slide found that of all the American films listed between 1911 and 1920, twenty per cent were written by women. He writes, “By my count, there were 245 women active as screenwriters between 1911 and 1920, and 299 between 1921 and 1930. Of that number, eighty-nine in the first decade and 103 in the second had credits on only one film.” (ibid. 115).

With the coming of the talkies, business of films transformed into big corporate studio system in Hollywood, the presence of women in the multiple sectors of filmmaking started to thin out (Gains and Vatsal 2013; Nelmes 2012: 265). Corporatization of filmmaking process through the big studios hint at a consumer culture or the market, that is a patriarchal domain, from which women have traditionally kept away. The market place (a space for consumer culture) has been associated with the concepts of ‘individuality, purposive action and rationality’ that is a male domain whereas the confines of family and domesticity have been attributed to women (Poole 2004). It is thus, a logical corollary to assume that active involvement of women in the market of cinema would not be encouraged. A recent study conducted in the United States about the presence of women filmmakers in Hollywood, mentions that women are pushed out when finance starts flowing (Anderson 2015). However, the independent production facilities that developed in the 1960s and 1970s in Hollywood, led women back into the film industry leading to a much distinctive presence of women in the film industry in Hollywood and elsewhere (Cook 1993: XI). In the recent years, the Hollywood film industry has seen a number of successful women film directors. Names like Nora Ephron (*Sleepless in Seattle*, 1993), Nancy Meyers (*The Parent Trap*, 1998), Kathryn Biglow (*The Hurt Locker*, 2008), Mimi Ledger (*The Peace Maker*, 1997), Sophia Coppola (*The Bling Ring*, 2013) are some of the many woman filmmakers that are instantly recognized in the world of cinema. In the history of cinema, Biglow became the first women director to win the Academy Award for Best Direction in the year 2009 for her film *The Hurt Locker*, a feat so far not achieved by any other woman filmmaker.

2.2.1 Women in Indian cinema:

Dadasaheb Phalke wanted women to act in his film *Raja Harischandra*. But women and cinema was not a preferred mix in India. So, Phalke settled for men in wigs and women's clothes to play the role of his female characters. However in his second venture *Bhasmasur Mohini (1913)*, Phalke managed to cast the first Indian women on cinema. Kamlabai Gokhle and her mother Durga, who worked in a travelling drama company, thus became the first women to act in Indian cinema.

But acting still remained a taboo for women and the early actresses in Indian cinema were mostly Anglo-Indian who portrayed various roles on screen (Somaaya et al 2012: ix-xii). The new form of art being shrouded in social prejudices was only open for the men for exploration. While discussing all the factors contributing towards the development of the film industry in India, it is impossible not to discuss the contribution of the women professionals, especially the directors, to the Indian film industry.

Undeterred by the challenge of the vocation and the scrutiny of society, just like the first women actors, Fatma Begum took the reins of cinema in her hand. First as an actor and then as a director Fatma Begum opened new avenues for the women to explore the art form through their perspective and subjectivity. Fatma Begum to Indian cinema is what Alice Guy Blanche is to world cinema. A legacy that has been preserved and flourished in able hands creating some of the most intense visual and narrative moments on celluloid. The women directors in Indian Cinema have examined the experiences, problems and hardships encountered by women from their viewpoint of a woman (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998: 81). Fatma Begum was an actor before she took to direction. She was also an accomplished actor who debuted with Ardeshir Irani's *Veer Abhimanyu* in 1922. In the year 1926 she founded Fatma Films and directed her first film *Bulbul-e-Paristan*. She directed a total of eight films under her production company Victoria-Fatma Films in 1928. Fatma Begum was perhaps the first female star of Indian cinema. She directed her film *Bubul-e-Paristan* in the year 1926 with her daughter Zubeida as the leading lady. She

then went on to direct seven more films. But the accolade of being the first Indian women on screen goes to Durgabai Kamat and her daughter Kamlabai. Durgabai played the role of Parvati and Kamlabai played the role of Mohini in Dadasaheb Phalke's second film *Bhasmasur Mohini*.

After Fatma Begum, the Hindi film industry in India saw a host of talented women plunging into film making. Sai Paranjpye and Vijaya Mehta are two names who became that shone in art house cinema with their masterpieces like *Sparsh*, *Katha*, *Pestonjee*, *Rao Saheb* etc. Her legacy has been carried forward by other directors like Kalpana Lajmi, Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, Aparna Sen, Tanuja Chandra, Vijaya Mehta and Gurinder Chadha. Recently names like Anusha Rizvi, Gauri Shinde, Kiran Rao, Farah Khan etc. have carved a niche in the field of direction, an area usually reserved for men and films of the female directors often branded as art movies or movies of the parallel cinema (Verma 2005: 53).

Sai Paranjpye, a Padma Bhushan and graduate from National School of Drama has been a prolific writer and director of plays before she entered films. Her first film *Sparsh* (1980) won her a National Award for Best Screenplay. Paranjpye won many more accolades in the national and international level for her films. Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha (all settled and directing films from abroad) have earned laurels across the cinematic world. Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* (1988) was judged the best film in the National Film Awards in the year 1988. Deepa Mehta is well known for the films with strong feminist propaganda. Her *Water* (2005) about the plight of widows in Vrindavan was Canada's official entry to the Oscars. She had to overcome staunch criticism and opposition to finally develop the full feature film. Aparna Sen making films in Hindi, English and Bengali is another accomplished director. Sen's films have won many accolades at the national and international level. She has also won the Golden Lotus for Best Direction at the 2002 National Awards for the film *Mr and Mrs Iyer* (2002). Though not as prolific as Mehta, Nair and Sen, Kalpana Lajmi is another women director who has produced films with strong female characters. Her *Rudaali* (1993) and *Daman* (2001) have been appreciated by film lovers and critics alike. On the other hand there is Farah Khan who have dealt in contemporary commercial entertainers and earned ample commercial success.

Her films *Main Hoon Na* (2004) and *Om Shanti Om* (2007) were heavy earners at the box office. Kiran Rao, Anusha Rizvi and Gauri Shinde are those new age directors who have dealt in films with contemporary themes. The women directors though mostly confined to the boundaries of small and medium budget films have made movies that stand out on the international stage (Verma 2005: 53).

As films made a late entrance into the cultural arena of Assam, woman engaged with it from the very beginning. Aideu Handique played the role of the heroic Ahom Princess Joymati in the first Assamese film *Joymati* (1935) directed by Jyotiprasad Agarwala. However, it was not till the 1980s that women took the job of direction in Assamese cinema. Suprabha Devi was the first women to direct a film in Assam. In the year 1984 she directed the film *Nayanmoni*. After Devi it was Kuntala Deka who took the reins of direction. Her film *Kanaklata* (1990) was about the famous freedom fighter and martyr Kanaklata Barua. Through these two ladies are not spoken of much, they set an exemplary precedent for others to try their hand at film a making. Dr Santwana Bordoloi's *Adajya* (The one who cannot be burnt) (1996) based on Dr Mamoni Roisom Goswami' novel *Dotal Hatir Uiyee Khowa Howda* (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker), went on to win the Best Regional Film in Assamese award in the National Film Awards. The film with strong feminist theme received critical acclaim and was appreciated by the movie goers. Manju Borah, another filmmaker with national and international acclaim is known for films with strong feminist sentiment and relevant social themes. The advanced technologies and comparative ease of film making in the present era have inspired these directors to venture into the profession. Manju Borah has also directed another film on the life of Ahom Princes Joymati. Her film is the second ever attempt in Assamese cinema to recreate Joymati on screen after Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. While Borah and Bordoloi have kept away from the entertainers, Suman Haripriya has given two successful entertaining films-*Koina Mur Dhunia* (2001) and *Kokadeutar Ghor Juwai* (2002). Her *Kodom Tale Krishna Nache* (2005), a film based on the Vasnavaites traditions of Assam propounded

by Shrimanta Shankaradeva was appreciated at the Nation film awards. *Kodom Tale Krisha Nache* was awarded the Best Regional Film Assamese language.

Though lesser in number of productions, the women filmmakers of Assam are no less prolific in artistic quality, technicality and cinematic grammar than those in 'mainstream' of the filmmaking industry of the country.

2.2.2 Women filmmakers of India:

Fatma Begum: The Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema by Rajadhyaksha and Willmen describes Fatma Begum as 'probably the first Indian woman film producer and director' (Rajadhyaksha and Willmen 1999: 95). She was married to the Nawab of Sachin. She started her career as an actor in the Urdu stage. Her first film as an actor was Ardeshir Irani's *Veer Abhimanyu* (1922). She acted in films produced by the famous Konihor and Imperial Studios. She started Fatma Films in 1926 which she renamed as Victoria-Fatma Films in 1928. While producing, writing and directing, she also continued to act in her own film. Fatma Begum's acting career extended to the 1930s. Her daughters Zubeida, Sultana and Shahzadi were also actors. She directed her first film *Bulbul-e-Paristan* in 1926, starring her daughter Zubeida, to become the first woman filmmaker of India (ibid. 19). Zubeida had the credit of acting in the first Indian talkie, *Alam Ara* (1931) (Thoraval 2000: 10-25).

Some of the films that Fatma Begum acted are: *Veer Abhimanyu* (1922), *Pritivi Vallabh* (1924), *Gul-e-Bakavali Vallabh* (1924), *Kala Naag Vallabh* (1924), *Sati Sardarba Vallabh* (1924), *Naharsingh Daku Vallabh* (1925), *Devadasi* (1925), *Mumbai Ni Mohini* (1925), *Gaud Bangal* (1925), *Khubsoorat Bala* (1926), *Indrajaal* (1926), *Panna Ratna* (1926). The films that she directed were: *Bulbul-e-Paristan* (1926), *Chandravali* (1928), *Heer Ranjha* (1928), *Kanakatara* (1929), *Milan Dinar* (1929), *Naseeb Ki Devi* (1929), *Shakuntala* (1929), *Mahasundar* (1929) (Rajadhyaksha and Willmen 1999: 95). As was the trend in film during the era, Fatma Begum's film revolved around the themes of myth, mythology and fantasy, indicative by the film's title.

Fatma Begum acted in films ranging from mythologicals to thrillers. Her first film *Veer Abhimanyu* (1922) was a big budget film. Based on a story from the

Mahabharata, Fatma Begum played the role of Subhadra, Abhimanyu mother. Her daughter Sultana also acted in the film (ibid. 245). *Prithvi Vallabh* (1924) was the first India's film adaptation. The story was from a serialized publication in *Mundhi* in the journal *Vismi Sadi*. The story was about King Munja who lived life according to his will and was true to himself in all events. Fatma played the role of Minalvati, the widowed sister of Munja's arch enemy. Minalvati is the love interest of Munja in the film. The film was remade in 1943 by Sohrab Modi. In *Gul-e-Bakavali* (1924) Fatma Begum acted with her daughters Zubeida and Sultana. Zubeida played the roles of fairy Bakavali. *Kala Naag* (1924) was a crime thriller and alluded to event known as the Champi-Haridas murder in Bombay at that time (ibid. 246). *Sati Sardarba* (1924) again featured the mother-daughter trio. Zubeida played the role of Sardarba and the film was about an alcoholic brother losing his sister in a wager (ibid. 247). In *Mumbai Ni Mohini* (1925) Fatma played the role of a young wife to a rich older man (ibid. 247).

Fatma Begum's first directed film *Bulbul-e-Paristan* (1926) was a fantasy revolving around the story of a fairyland. The film was full with special effects. The cinematography of the film was done by Rustom Irani and Ardeshir Irani. The film starred Zubeida in the lead role. Sultana and Fatma Begum also acted in the film (ibid. 249).

Sai Paranjpye: Sai Paranjpye is a film director, screenwriter and theatre personality from Maharashtra who has directed films like *Sparsh*, *Katha*, *Chashme Buddoor* and *Disha*. *Sparsh* fetched two national awards in 1980 for Best Feature Film in Hindi, Best Screenplay and Best Actor. Her films are known for their social themes and for addressing various issues in different perspectives. *Sparsh* tried to look into the world of the visually impaired through the two main characters, a blind school principal (played by Naseeruddin Shah) and a sighted teacher (played by Shabana Azmi). Paranjpye came up with the story and plot of her film that was initially a staged play, after a work assignment, during her television days, to make a documentary on World Handicap Day (Rangayan and Gupta: 2013). In 1993 her film *Choodiyan* was given the National Award for Best Film on Social Issues. *Choodiyan* was a

documentary based on an anti-liquor agitation in a village in Maharashtra. A graduate from National School of Drama, Paranjpye started her career as an announcer for All India Radio. Apart from films she has also written and directed plays in Hindi, English and Marathi. In both her ventures, film and theatre, she has written and directed for adults as well as children. She also served as a producer-director at Doordarshan and twice as the Chairperson of Children's Film Society of India.

Paranjpye has touched on many aspects and issues while making films. The humour in *Chashme Buddoor* (1981) reminds all of her typical style of film making. Paranjpye feels that women bring a kind of sensitivity to cinema and the characters are well rounded (Timeout and Tumbler).

Vijaya Mehta: Adorned with Sangeet Natak Academy Award and National Award, Vijaya Mehta has to her credit staged, acted and directed plays as well as films of critical acclaim. She is a founder member of 1960s Marathi experimental theatre with playwright Vijay Tendulkar and actor Arvind Deshpande. Her feature film, *Rao Saheb* (1985) depicts the struggle between orthodox traditions and progressive ideas told through struggles of widows in the society. As Gokulsing and Dissanayake pointed out, in *Rao Saheb*, 'a woman director sought to capture the problems and privations of women from a feminist perspective' (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998: 83-84). Mehta, who also acted in the film, won the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actress. Her next film *Pestonjee* (1987) is a story about two friends. The film is set in the backdrop of the various struggles of the Parsi community. The film was awarded the National Award for Best Feature film in Hindi.

TP Rajalakshmi: Thiruvaiyaru Panchapakesa Rajalakshmi is acknowledged to be the first women director of Southern Cinema. Rajalakshmi started her career as a stage actress, forced by poverty. But she went on to work with some of the best names of Tamil Theatre like Sankaradas Swamigal, considered the father of Tamil Theatre. As theatre actor she played many lead roles and also travelled to Yangoon to perform. Her first appearance on celluloid was in a silent film *Kovalan* in 1929. Rajalakshmi was the lead actor in the first Tamil talkie film

Kalidasa (1931) where she also sang and danced. Her popularity in cinema increased and she was bestowed with the title of 'Cinema Rani'. After her experience with acting, Rajalakshmi in the year 1936 ventured to direct her first film *Miss Kamala*. Her second directorial venture *Madurai Veeran* (1938) was hugely successful but her third and final film as a director *Indhiya Thaa*i could not repeat the success of her earlier films. She also played the role of an old woman in the film, which led to the belief that she had aged and film offers to Rajalakshmi dried up. Her hard earned glory and success was gone and in 1964 she died of illness in a rented house leaving a legacy for the future to look back.

Kommareddy Savithri: Like many other early actors, Savithri's career started with the theatre on the stage. This star of South cinema started her film career with small roles. She got her big break in 1952 in a Telugu film titled *Pelli Ches*i *Choodu*. After the initial success, Savithiri acted in many Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi films and in 1960 received the Rashtrapati Award for her performance in the Telugu film *Chivaraku Migiledi* (1960). Savithiri is one of the early women film directors in South cinema. In 1968 she produced and directed her first film *Chinnari Papalu* in Telugu. Her other films include *Chiranjeevi* (1969), *Maathru Devatha* (1969) and *Vintha Samsaram* (1971) in Telugu and *Kuzhanthai Ullam* (1969) and *Praptham* (1971) in Tamil.

Paluvayi Bhanumathi Ramakrishna: This multi talent lady was an actress, director, music director, singer, producer, book writer and song writer at the same time. Majority of the films that she acted in were Tamil and Telugu. However, she also acted in a few Hindi movies. Debuting in 1939 in a Telugu film titled *Vara Vikrayam*, Ramakrishna established herself as an accomplished actor and in 1965 was awarded the Rashtrapati Award for acting in the film *Antastulu* (1965). Having established her prowess as an actor and playback singer, Bhanumathi Ramakrishna ventured towards film direction. The first film to be released under her direction was *Chandirani* in 1953. The film was made in Tamil, Telugu as well as Hindi and Bhanumathi Ramakrishna also took over the role of producer in the film. Her last film as a director was *Pelli Kanuka* in 1998. In 2003 Government of India awarded her *Padma Bhushan* for her contribution to Indian cinema.

Prema Karanth: Prema Karanth is the first woman director of Kannada cinema. In her initial days, Karanth was associated with stage plays. She not only directed stage plays but also designed costumes for many. Her association with cinema started with the films *Hamsa Geethe* (1975) and *Kudre Motte* (1977) as an art director. In 1983 she produced and directed the film *Phaniyamma* (1983) earning her the rank of being the first women director in Kannada cinema. The film was based on the Sahitya Academy Award winning novel of the same name by MK Indira. *Phaniyamma* left an indelible mark in Indian cinema and have ever since been applauded for being a film highlighting issues related to women. The film won many awards including the National Film Award for Best Film Feature Film in Kannada. Dealing with the plight of widows, the film portrays the growth and evolution of a child widow Phani who later challenges the oppressive customs of the society. The film is an endearing tale about female subjectivity in a patriarchal society limited by stubborn ideologies, laws and traditions (Dissanayake and Gokulsing 1998: 81-21).

Arundhati Debi: One of the pioneers of Bengali cinema, Arundhati Devi was a multi-faceted, acting, writing, producing and directing films. A student of Vishwa Bharati University, Devi was a trained at dance, singing and theatre. Her first film as an actor was *Mahaprasthanar Pathey* (1952). After a successful stint in acting, she took to direction in the year 1967 with the film *Chhuti*. Devi also wrote the script, composed and directed music in the film. The film was awarded Certificate of Merit in the 1967 National Film Awards. She directed a few more films after *Chhuti* but her most popular film was *Padi Pishir Barmi Baksha* (1972) based on a popular children's novel of the same name by Leela Majumdar.

Suprabha Devi and Kuntala Deka: Suprabha Devi was the first woman in Assam to take the reins of film direction into her hand. In 1983 she directed her first film, *Nayanmoni*. Although the film did not leave a lasting effect, she paved a way for other women enthusiasts to explore the territories of the cinematic world. In 1986, Suprabha Devi co-directed another film *Sarabjan* based on a short story by Assamese literary icon Lakshminath Bezbarua. She was also

related to the medium of television and produced and directed several documentaries for Doordarshan.

After Suprabha Devi, it was Kuntala Deka who explored the art of film making. A lawyer by profession, Deka made a film on freedom fighter and martyr Kanaklata Baruah. Her film *Kanaklata* was released in the year 1990. Though Deka never made a second film, *Kanaklata* made a mark in the depository of Assamese cinema to bring the nationalist movement into the movie screen.

The legacy of these pioneers has opened a platform for many to construct and create new citadels for the seventh art. Thriving with new tales, meanings and style, film making in the hands of the women directors found a new direction. Stories and characters found a new lease as applause and appreciation were showered. The prowess of these women filmmakers have been evident through the films that they have made. These directors have explored varied issues and perspectives when narrating tales through the celluloid. The modern women directors have delved into many socio-political issues to produce films touched the cords of the life of the audience. Actor and filmmaker, Revathi directed the much acclaimed films *Mitr, My Friend* (2002) and *Phir Milenge* (2004). Both the films deal with issues those are very much relevant in the current times. While *Mitr, My Friend* depicts the crisis and survival of a family caught in the currents of tradition and cosmopolitan life, *Phir Milenge* was appreciated for its endeavour to generate social awareness for the victims of HIV/AIDS. Nandita Das has been much appreciated as an actor in the national as well as the international stage. But her proficiency as a director came to fore in 2008 with her film *Firaaq*. With a cast of accomplished actors from the Indian film industry, *Firaaq* explores the socio-political scenario of a nation plagued with religious fanaticism. Nandita Das also co-authored the film and it was appreciated on the national and international scene with many awards. While touching the veins of the audience with socially relevant issues and poignant tales of humanity, Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta have established themselves as accomplished filmmakers in the world stage. Most of Nair's films revolve around a wide range of subjects from biographies to literary adaptations. Her films also focus on the native culture, people and tales that she was born to. *Salaam Bombay* (1988) that

brought her acclaim as a film director looked into the lives of the children on the streets on India's financial capital, Bombay (now Mumbai). Her next film *Mississippi Masala* (1991) explores the lives of the Indian diaspora settled in the United States. *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1996), *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and *The Namesake* (2006) are tales with Indian culture and ethos placed in the main theme or plot. Nair's other films like *Hysterical Blindness* (2002), *Vanity Fair* (2004), *Amelia* (2009) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2013) are an amalgamation of varying themes as well as genres in film making. While *Vanity Fair* is a costume drama, *Amelia* is a biography and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a literary adaptation.

Deepa Mehta has earned critical acclaim as a filmmaker for the elements trilogy- *Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005). Particularly known for her strong female characters, Mehta has also dwelt with themes of love and politics in other films. *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002) is a family drama about an immigrant Indian family at Canada, *The Republic of Love* (2003) is a romantic comedy and *Midnight's Children* (2012) - based on the novel by Salman Rushdie, is a tale about the political and social turmoil of the Indian nation as it moved towards independence.

It is not only the thought provoking themes that women filmmakers in India have dwelt in, they have also jingled in the box office with popular entertainers. While experimenting with style and content, these new age directors also grabbed the popular pulse. Farah Khan with her blockbusters and star packed cast is perhaps the one with the most successful entertainers. Her maiden directorial venture *Main Hoon Na* (2004) was a big hit among the cinema going audience. Khan kept up her debutant success was followed up by her later two films *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Tees Maar Khan* (2010) and *Happy New Year* (2014). An established choreographer, Khan has also produced and written for a few films. Her films have been a favourite in the popular film awards.

Farah Khan's achievement mirrors the accomplishment of Gurinder Chadha, the Indian origin filmmaker in Britain. With films like *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) Chadha gained wide popularity among the

Indian audience. Chadha's other films deal on a wide range of subjects ranging from subjects dealing with the Indian diaspora to teenage comedy. Her 1993 film *Bhaji on the Beach* is about a group of Indian immigrant women in Britain. The film looks into their lives in the foreign land and the crossroads between tradition and modernity where they find themselves. *What's Cooking?* (2000) is a British/American comedy drama focusing on four families different ethnic diversity. *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) is a teenage comedy based on two teenage novels by Louise Rennison. *It's a Wonderful Afterlife* (2010) is another comedy about a series of murder committed by a woman obsessed with her daughter's marriage. Tanuja Chandra is another filmmaker who has created indelible impression on Indian cinema with films with perceptible female protagonists. She has directed eight feature films in Hindi—*Dushman* (1998), *Sangharsh* (1999), *Yeh Zindagi Ka Safar* (2001), *Sur – The Melody of Life* (2002), *Film Star* (2005), *Zindaggi Rocks* (2006) and *Hope and a Little Sugar* (2006). This array of inspiring filmmakers also includes a few newer stars. Gauri Shinde's 2012 film *English Vinglish* garnered a lot of appreciation from film lovers. Written by Shinde, *English Vinglish* states the dilemma and determination of its protagonist trying to adjust her into a cosmopolitan environment that her children and husband live in. Like Shinde, Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti, Anusha Rizvi and Kiran Rao though comparatively novel in direction has had their films appreciated by the film loving audience. With their new age subjects and story treatment, they have cut a niche for themselves in the Indian making industry. *Luck By Chance* (2009), *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011), *Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd* (2007), *Talaash* (2012), and *Dhobi Ghat* (2011) have all been big successes.

Apart from the names that have made it in the Hindi film industry there are many women filmmakers who are making films in many different languages. The Bengali film industry has given the nation some of the finest of filmmakers. The women in the industry have been as successful as their male counterparts. Alongside Aparna Sen, Satarupa Sanyal, Shonali Bose, Nandita Roy are some names that have been making films in Bengali in the recent times. In the South film industry the names that have attracted a lot of attention and appreciation

are Sripriya, Soundarya Rajnikanth, Aishwaryaa Dhanush, Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi, Lakshmy Ramakrishnan, Ambika and JS Nandhini.

All the above mentioned filmmakers have without doubt added various perspectives to the Indian film industry. For my study I have taken three contemporary filmmakers, Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Manju Borah who have carved a niche for themselves in the Indian film scenario. They have stayed away from the commercial style of film making but have still made their presence felt through their powerful style of film making. They have been critically appreciated and also bestowed with the country's highest awards for the film industry, the National Film Awards.

2.2.3 Summary of the films of Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Manju Borah

Aparna Sen: Daughter of renowned Bengali film critic, writer and filmmaker, Chidananda Dasgupta, Aparna Sen the world of films was never alien to this acclaimed director. Aparna Sen's career in the world of cinema has been a multifarious one with writing, directing and acting with equal ease and proficiency. She made her film debut as an actor in 1961 in Satyajit Ray's film *Teen Kanya*. Sen has acted in several films including those where she was the director. With an enviable collection of directorial ventures under her name, Sen has established herself among the best of the filmmakers in the Indian film industry in the contemporary times. In the National Film Awards, Sen has won the Golden Lotus for the Best Director for the film *Mr and Mrs Iyer* and *36 Chowringhee Lane*. *Mr and Mrs Iyer* also won the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration and National Film Award for Best Screenplay. All the ten films that Sen had directed have been appreciated by cinema lovers. A brief appraisal of the films that Aparna Sen have directed:

36 Chowringhee Lane (1981): The film details the life of an old Anglo Indian woman living alone in Kolkata. Violet Stoneham teaches English in a city school and lives with her cat, Sir Toby. Her niece is married and stays away from her and her brother is senile and lives at a home for the aged. Violet, thus, lives a virtually solitary life.

Violet comes across her old student Nandita and her lover Samaresh Moitra on Christmas Day and invites them for a cup of coffee at the apartment. Samaresh was not initially happy to visit Violet but takes a liking to the quiet place and is tempted to use it as their meeting place. Nandita places the matter to Violet on the pretext that Samaresh is a budding writer and needs a quiet place to write. Violet invites Samaresh to use her apartment during the school hours for writing. The couple reminds her of her younger days and finds unusual company in them. They seem like a breath of fresh air in her lonely life. She even forgets to visit her brother and takes longer time to write back to her niece. Soon, Violet's brother passes away and Samaresh and Nandita get married with no time or will to call upon her. She calls them for Christmas but they excuse themselves on the pretext of being out on an official tour. Violet however bakes her promised Christmas cake and decides to drop it at their place and is shocked to find a party on with guest enjoying by her record player that was a wedding gift to Nandita and Samaresh. She walks alone in the night quoting Shakespeare.

The film is Aparna Sen's directorial debut and through the protagonist narrates the tale of the Anglo-Indian community in the changing times. Violet, her neighbours in the building as well as her colleagues are caught in the tussle of changing times.

Parama (1984): Parama, is the leading protagonist of the film. She is a responsible home-maker, a dutiful wife of an affluent working man, compliant daughter in law, a loving mother, a caring aunt and a good sister-in-law. Parama comes to the notice of a famous young photographer, Rahul Rai during Durga Puja. Rahul Rai is a friend of her nephew and is settled in the United States. While on a trip to cover the Puja spirit in Bengal, Parama catches the fancy of this young photographer as a probable theme for his next feature. Rahul starts his venture featuring Parama sometime after the Puja. Though initially reluctant, Parama gets over the uneasy feeling when Rahul is around with the camera. After a while they come together in an intimate relationship. But after the project Rahul returns to the United States. He writes to Parama and sends her the latest magazines with his photographs. One of the magazines carries photographs of Parama including a seemingly sensual one where she with a

note inscribed by Rahul for her. This photograph reveals their relationship to Parama's family and all are infuriated at her. Her husband refuses to talk to her and her children are also alienated from her. Parama tries to commit suicide when she learns that Rahul has left New York and his current address is unknown. She is admitted to the hospital now visited by all her near and dear ones. It is presumed that a feeling of guilt has taken over her. But Parama to the surprise of all denies having any feeling of guilt.

Sati (1989): The film opens by informing the viewers the period (1828) that it is set in. The immediate scene depicts a procession whereby a woman to be burnt with her husband's corpse. Meanwhile the people in the procession are worried about the changing times and the colonial law imposing a ban on *sati*. But the priest is optimistic that a 'pious and devoted' woman would carry on the tradition. This procession is watched in awe by the protagonist of the film, Umi. It is through Umi that the filmmaker strives to give another dimension to the discourse to being a *sati*.

Umi is a mute girl brought up by her maternal uncle in an impoverished Brahmin household whose marriage delayed due to her disability and 'faulty horoscope'. She spends her time doing household chores and rearing the cattle by the river side. Her cousin, Sashi, has to be married off but Umi and their poverty stands as a hurdle. In order to do away with the bad omen, Umi is married to a tree. The eldest son marries for the second time in order to collect some dowry to be used in Sashi's marriage. Umi, unaware of the ways of the world is seduced by a close family friend, Nabin. The relationship continues until Umi gets pregnant. The abuses become more and her family finds a local medicine to terminate her pregnancy. Through all the instances of human indignation towards her, the banyan tree to which she was married to become her silent companion. Umi is asked to stay in the cattle shed until the abortion comes through. She is not allowed inside the hut on a stormy night and seeks shelter in the tree. In the morning Umi is found dead beside the storm-torn tree.

Aparna Sen has made bold observations over the prejudiced social system that treated women with no dignity. The film ends with a tragic mockery of the

corrupt system when an innocent girl dies by the inanimate tree to which she was bound to. A similar incident with a living husband would have elevated her to the status of a *sati*, while she was always second to him in life.

Yugant (1995): The film starts with Deepak and Anushuya meeting at the train station. They have been married for seventeen years but stay apart for various reasons. As they meet after a gap of a year and a half, their life story is played in flash backs. Deepak is the MD of an advertising agency and Anushuya an acclaimed dancer. Though the couple is very much in love with each other, they fail to overcome their differences.

The film through its lead characters also comments on various environmental issues and human vanity. The receding vegetation along coast lines, dams and struggles of the farmers, war and its many consequences including environmental. Deepak and Anushuya both share a fair amount of concern reading these issues but do not share each other's view point in registering dissent against them. While Anushuya uses art to demonstrate her concern, Deepak is more of an activist. These various differences at personal and professional level keep them apart despite their love.

They spend a week together trying to reconcile their marriage and relationship. The film ends on a heartrending note while they fail to understand each other and Deepak walks towards the sea only to be caught in a fire raised by the spilled oil.

Paramitar Ek Din (2000): *Paramitar Ek Din* depicts the relationship of the protagonist Paramita with her mother-in-law, Sanaka. The two women are caught in marriages that do not give them any happiness. Paramita is an educated woman married to the younger son of Sanaka and it is his will that prevails. Similarly, Sanaka's husband is a boastful who manages the family business and is seldom home. Further, the two women's terminally ill children give them a common thread for bonding. While Sanaka's daughter is schizophrenic, Paramita's son suffers from cerebral palsy Paramita is aware of her mother-in-law's impetuous nature and the situations that prompt them. She recognizes the freedom that Sanaka feels after the death of her husband. Sanaka

also does not resist Paramita's growing friendship with Rajib Shrivastav. Through their similarities and differences Sanaka and Paramita develops a friendship filled with mutual respect with each other. But Sanaka is heartbroken when Paramita asks her son for divorce. Her rage and apprehension is not because of her daughter-in-law's wish to marry a different man but at of the loss of a companion that she had found in her. Paramita marries Rajib and moves away. She returns years later for a brief period to look after a bed ridden Sanaka.

The film is picturised as a flash of memories that Paramita has sitting in the courtyard of the old house on the day of Sanaka's memorial service. The film is a tale of friendship, love, bonding and mutual respect that the two women develops and nourishes throughout their lives.

Mr and Mrs Iyer (2002): The film earned Aparna Sen the second Golden Lotus for Best Direction in the National Film Awards. Set in the backdrop of communal violence, the film documents the journey of two people from different religious backgrounds and their growing friendship.

Meenakshi Iyer is a Tamil Brahmin girl on the way to her husband's place at Kolkata. She is introduced to Raja Chowdhury by a family friend who is also set to travel to Kolkata. Meenakshi, with her conservative religious beliefs becomes uneasy on learning about Raja's Muslim identity. On their bus journey they had to pass through a riot infested area and are intercepted by some Hindu extremists looking for Muslims in the bus. Despite her conservative beliefs, Meenakshi lies to the men that Raja is her husband, Mr Iyer. They successfully disguise their identity and seek shelter in a neighbouring village. They finally reach their destination without any harm and Meenakshi is received by her husband at the train station.

The journey unfurls the beliefs, ideas and attitude of the two persons. They rise above their differences and develop a bond of trust and mutual understanding. Driven out of their comfort zone, they are forced to adjust and compromise with situations. They part as friends with admiration for each other.

The film was also awarded the Nargis Dutt Award for the Best Film Promoting National Integration. It is an inspiring tale of love, trust and humanity thriving at most trying times.

15 Park Avenue (2005): The film's protagonist Mithi (Mitali) is a patient of Schizophrenia and the entire events of the film revolves around this central character. Mithi lives with her mother and her older sister, Anu who takes care of her. Her mental condition and ill health calls for all the attention of Anu and her mother. The opening shots of the film shows Anu driving Mithi around trying to find House no. 15 in a particular street named Park Avenue. Anu is well aware of Mithi's illusions but takes care not to reveal them to Mithi. Anu who is a college professor finds very little time for her after caring for her sister. As the film progresses it is revealed that Mithi's Schizophrenia has set in at a very young age. The disease took over her after she became victim to a brutal gang rape. Her fiancé, Joydeep, calls off their engagement only to meet her as a married man eleven years later. But Mithi does not recognize him. All she can ask him is to help her find her family—her husband and five kids living on 15 Park Avenue. As a last resort to bring some authenticity to her claim, Mithi is driven around by Anu, Joydeep, and her physician. The film ends on a surreal note where Mithi reconciles with her family.

The film revolves around Mithi and her sister Anu. The director resists from giving a sympathetic or melodramatic treatment to a sensitive subject like mental illness. The various relationships that the characters share have an effect on each other. Anu cannot go after her wishes because she has to take care of her sister and mother. Joydeep shares a confused emotional state having seen his former lover many years later. For Mithi, it is about finding her own world, even if it is an imaginary one. Mithi finds her place only the others do not see it.

The Japanese Wife (2010): The film chronicles the love story of a Bengali man Snehamoy and a Japanese woman, Miyage. Snehamoy and Miyage are two shy people living in two different places. They are pen friends and write regularly to each other fall in love and eventually marry each other. While circumstances prevent them on being physically present at their marriage, they take their vows

symbolically as per their own culture. Snehamoy sends Miyage a pair of conch bangle and some vermilion as a symbol of a married Bengali woman. Despite the differences in culture and difficulty in communication the two lovers exchange emotions. As Snehamoy continues his relationship with Miyage, his aunt brings home her widowed goddaughter, Sandhya in the hope of getting her married to Snehamoy. Though Snehamoy bonds with her young son, he remains aloof from the young and beautiful Sandhya. The two people however come to an unspoken understanding of trust and respect for each other's personal space. Miyage plans to come to Snehamoy after her mother passes away but is taken ill. She is diagnosed with cancer and bedridden for a long time. Snehamoy is determined to find a cure to his wife's disease and sets out to consult various doctors. He however returns to his village on realizing that nothing much can be done without the presence of the person. On the way back home Snehamoy encounters a heavy rain and storm and he catches pneumonia. He is nursed by his aunt and Sandhya but succumbs due to lack of proper medical attention. The love story of Snehamoy and Miyage ends without them seeing each other. Miyage is cured of cancer and in an attempt to continue the relationship comes to Snehamoy's home dressed in the garb of a Hindu widow with a tonsured head as per the rituals she has learnt from Snehamoy's letters.

Iti Mrinalini (2011): Mrinalini Mitra is an aging film actress having a romantic relationship with a filmmaker, Imtiaz. They have just completed a film together and Imtiaz hints that she might be approached for the role of 'Nandini' in his next film, *Rakta Karabi*. Though Mrinalini is aware that her age is an impediment in the way of playing that particular role, she looks forward to being formally offered to enact it. Mrinalini is heartbroken when the role is offered to a younger actor at a social gathering in the presence of many people. She also discovers that Imtiaz is attracted towards this younger actor. Heartbroken, Mrinalini goes back to her apartment and decides to end her life. As she sits to write her suicide note, Mrinalini starts remembering her whole life. She remembers her days in college and her first lover, who was shot for being a radical. She was a girl from a lower middle class family who had taken up acting to support herself. She remembers her initial days as a young actor

when she looked up to the established in the industry, when trivial controversies would trouble her and when every achievement would excite her. She remembers her relationship with filmmaker Siddhartha Roy. She had a child with him but being in a socially unsanctioned relationship; Mrinalini's child was brought up by her brother and his wife in Canada. She has a bunch of happy memories of her daughter who was killed in a plane crash leaving her virtually alone in the world. Meanwhile Mrinalini gets friendly with a writer, Chintan Nair who has been a source of support for her. Mrinalini decides to leave the collection of poetry and her dog 'Begum' to Chintan. She takes a long break from acting and returns to the screen with Imtiaz Chowdhury's film. It was while shooting for Imtiaz's film that a fire breaks out in the set and her assistant and her companion of a long time, Kamala *di* passes away. Kamala's death was another stroke of misfortune in her already troubled life. Day dawns as Mrinalini seats tracking down her life. She gets a mobile message from her old friend Chintan informing her that he is visiting her. In the flash of a moment she realizes the futility of her desire to end her life and that life has been not that bad. She takes her dog out for a walk and as fate would take its turn, a stray bullet hits her and ends her life.

Goynar Baksho (2013): The film narrates the story of the women of a Bengali household snapping over three generations. *Goynar baksho* or the jewelry is the central prop that has been used in the film narrative. Rashmoni now an old woman was widowed at the age of thirteen. Daughter of a wealthy land owning family Rashmoni was gifted a box full of jewelry on her wedding. She had to don the widow's garb upon the death of her husband and the jewelry sat pretty inside the wooden box except being used for occasional amusement by her. Rashmoni, now an old woman, claims that it is the jewelry box that has helped her to stay that her natal home without humiliation. It is in the anticipation of inheriting the jewelry that she has been taken care of by her brother and his family. Rashmoni's younger nephew gets married and brings home the new bride, Shomlata. Shomlata is introduced to Rashmoni in anticipation of a piece of jewelry. Shomlata's naive nature impresses Rashmoni and she takes immediate liking to the young bride. Shomlata's husband and father-in-law bask

in the old glory of being landlords while their family belongings are sold one after another. A little later Rashmoni passes away and her lifeless body is discovered by Shomlata. However, Shomlata is interrupted by the ghost of the old lady who tells her to hide the jewelry away from the prying eyes of her brother and his family. The subsequent hiding of the box and its search leads to some hilarious situations with Rashmoni's ghost overseeing the scene. With the family's fortune dwindling Shomlata comes up with the idea of opening a saree store and uses some jewelry from the box to gather cash for it. Rashmoni who is enraged that her jewelry is being used for mortgage is soon overjoyed to hear that the shop has been named after her. She is happy that somebody remembered her. The box of jewelry becomes a metaphor for all the memories that Rashmoni has kept safe. Time and again she tells Shomlata of the time she was a young bride.

Kalpana Lajmi: Being the niece of acclaimed director and actor, Guru Dutt, Kalpana Lajmi, can be said, had an early exposure to the art of film making. She also worked as an assistant to the prominent filmmaker, Shyam Benegal. Her first movie was a documentary *D.G. Movie Pioneer* made in 1978. Revolving around social themes and women issues, her creations have attracted much critical acclaim.

Ek Pal (1986): The first feature film directed by Kalpana Lajmi revolves around the intricacies of conjugal life. The film stars Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi and Farooq Sheikh in the lead characters.

Priyam is the daughter of a wealthy businessman based in Shillong. She meets Jeet Barua in a party in a Jorhat Tea Garden. The two young people are attracted to each other and soon starts dating. The affair is short lived and Priyam is heartbroken when Jeet moves away from commitment after being selected to study abroad. Priyam's father, who is also her confidante, seeks her concern and fixes her marriage to Ved Hazarika, a tea garden employee. The new relationship seems to carry Priyam away from the memories of her former lover. But as her workaholic husband is unable to spend time with her, loneliness seeps into her life. Priyam spends eight years of her conjugal life

when Jeet returns from abroad. As Ved is commissioned on company duty to Kenya for a year, Priyam and Jeet rekindle their old romance. The romance leads to Priyam's pregnancy which is not received well by Jeet who wants her to abort the child. But Priyam having had a miscarriage earlier is adamant to keep the child and snaps her ties with Jeet. She leaves for the parent's home while awaiting her husband's return from Kenya. Meanwhile, Ved returns early and overjoyed to find Priyam pregnant. Priyam discloses that the child does not belong to Ved and the relationship that she had was a consensual one. Though Ved is shocked to hear the news, he accepts the child and his wife. In the last scene of the film Priyam leaves her parents' home with Ved and her child.

Though the woman is redeemed by her man in the end, the film distances itself from being judgmental. Priyam's affair with the other man is not pronounced as sin and dissected for her action.

Rudaali (1993): *Rudaali* is based on a short story by the same name written by Mahashweta Devi. The film is set against the physical and cultural backdrop of Rajasthan. The film revolves around the life of Sanichari, a woman in rural Rajasthan. She belongs to the most impoverished lot of the village population. Her husband is a bonded labourer at the landlord's place. Her father died soon after her birth and she was abandoned by her mother. Her husband is a drunkard with little to spare for the family requirements. She looks after her ailing mother-in-law and her little son. As the story progresses she loses her mother-in-law and her husband. Her son runs away after growing up. Sanichari starts leading a solitary life when a '*rudaali*'⁵, professional mourner, enters her life. *Rudaali* are women of a low caste in Northern India (particularly in the state of Rajasthan) who perform mourning dances and songs at the funerals of higher caste men (Hurlstone 2011: 10). The '*rudaali*' Bhikni and Sanichari develop a warm bond between them. Sanichari in all these years opens her heart to Bhikni. As the story comes to an end Sanichari as well as the audience learns that Bhikni was indeed the mother who had abandoned her as a child. This piece

⁵ '*Rudaali*' is a community of professional criers in Rajasthan in India. Dr. Mahuya Bhaumik describes '*rudaali*' as a custom of professional mourning prevalent among the lower caste women of rural Rajasthan for the deceased males of the upper castes, is a culture which can be regarded as a site of contestation where gender, class, caste and economic status are intertwined (Bhaumik 2015: 81).

of news works as the trigger to burst Sanichari's pent up emotions. She cries for the first time in her life and becomes a *rudaali*.

The film is a poignant depiction of exploitation and abject poverty and a system of exploitation that works in the circumstances. The poor has almost no power to exercise their rights and their only worry is to earn a livelihood for mere survival. In the environment of deprivation and exploitation it is constant struggle for the women

Darmiyaan: In Between (1997): Darmiyaan narrates the tale of a film actress (Zeenat) trying to maintain her foothold in the film industry and her transgender son's (Immi) struggle to fit into the surroundings he lives in. The story starts with a popular Hindi film star singing and dancing on screen. She is the breadwinner of the family and an admired actor. But the ever young and dynamic world of glitz and glamour starts to fade away from Zeenat.

On the other hand, there is Immi struggling with the fact of being born a transgender and trying to fit into the society that values only the binaries of gender. Immi tries to support Zeenat at her trying times and it is Zeenat who is not frantic about the duality of Immi's gender. But it is not until the end of the film that Immi calls Zeenat his mother. The fact that the popular film star had a son has been hidden to the world outside.

The societal unease to go beyond the binaries of gender has always been a topic of discussion in various circles. The identity crisis that Immi faces as a young child continues to his youth. In a self-reflexive style, the film also showcases the highs and lows of the film industry. While beauty and talent are celebrated they are also transitory. The ever growing industry does not wait for anyone to match its steps. The opening scenes of the film pay tribute to the Indian film industry of the forties. Zeenat is a film star of the forties and her story is a reflection of the many early names that faded from the film industry after the prime of their youth.

Darmiyaan is the story of these two individuals interwoven into each other's fate. While Zeenat is in the dilemma of bidding adieu to her waning career, Immi is at the crossroads of gender, his identity remaining ever ambiguous.

Daman: A Victim of Marital Rape (2001): True to Lajmi's choice of subject, Daman narrates the story of silent sufferers in the institution of marriage. At the center of the story is the protagonist, Durga who is married to a man of volatile temper. Written and directed by Lajmi, the film is a dramatic creation to portray the horrors of domestic violence. In the opening scenes of the film Goddess Durga is prayed to and as the film ends, the protagonist, named after the Goddess, assumes Her persona to kill her husband, the demon that have haunted her.

A girl from a poor family, Durga's life is transformed after marriage. She is exposed to physical and mental and physical torture of her womanizer and ill-tempered husband. Her identity as an individual and a woman is overpowered by her husband's patriarchal mindset. Though it is tough to miss the melodrama in the narrative Daman is remarkable for highlighting the narratives of Indian women. It gains our attention for discussing marital rape that is still a taboo and beyond the prosecution of law. Though the cinematography and narrative style of the film fails to generate as much appreciation, Lajmi does not deviate from her propaganda of highlighting concerns of women through her films. The film ends in a metamorphosis of the protagonist whereby she evolves from the weak and submissive belle to the persona of the Goddess after who she is named.

Kyon? (2003): The film depicts the life of a few college students and their issues with friendship and other things.

Chingaari: A Spark of Revolution (2006): The film is an attempt by Kalpana Lajmi to depict the system of exploitation that is built around religion. The social hierarchy that is created by an exploitative system is further validated by religion. Adapted from a story titled "Prostitute and Postman" by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Chingaari once again goes on to depict the extreme positioning of women in society, one as a Goddess and other as a prostitute. As a Goddess she is revered and strikes awe in the all-powerful man. As a prostitute she is denied the basic rights to her body and identity. Playing around the story of a prostitute, dominated by a priest and loved by a man, Chingaari brings the best in her out when her daughter is threatened by the priest. It is neither the

fearsome priest nor the benevolent lover that sparks her inner power but the 'pre-oedipal' bonding with her child that empowers her. Like Kristeva, motherhood is not an impediment for Lajmi but a celebration and an experience which would not belittle the self but express it in multifarious ways.

In the film, Basanti is a prostitute by profession living in the red light area of a village. Among her regulars is the head priest of the village temple, Bhuwan Panda, a man who exerts his power over the poor villagers through his religious frolics. His supremacy demands that a strict social hierarchy is maintained in the village in which he is aided by the police and the musclemen. His trajectory is disturbed when a postman, Chandan, comes to the village and falls in love with Basanti indicating at a matrimonial alliance between the two. Bhuwan Panda is furious at the course of event and kills Chandan. Basanti tries to gather herself at the loss but reacts when her child is threatened by the sham priest. The people of the village erupt in rebellion against the god man and his minions. In the climax Basanti kills Bhuwan Panda taking the image of who he claimed to pay obeisance to.

Manju Borah: She a filmmaker producing and directing films in Assam. Touching various socio-cultural issues, she has been conferred with many national and international film awards. Apart from feature films, Manu Borah also has a series of documentaries, tele-films and serials to her credit. Her film, *Aai Kot Nai*, was awarded Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration in 56th National Film Awards 2008. She has also been awarded Women of Excellence Award by FICCI for contribution in the field of Film & Entrepreneurship in the year 2009.

A summary of her films under study:

Baibhab (A Scam in Verse) (1999): Directed by Manju Borah, the film follows the lead character Samiran Choudhury to look into various intricacies and complexities of life. The opening scene traces Samiran celebrating the birthday of his deceased mother and younger brother by the banks of a river. Samiran is a poet and is very sensitive by nature. He creates his poetry from his life experiences. He carries the guilt whereby his little brother was killed in an

accident in his childhood. He also feels that very incident was responsible for his mother's ill health and her untimely death. At the present stage of his life Samiran is going through a divorce. He has left his teaching job and is wandering around his poems.

Samiran is helped by his friends Bibhas and Najneen in writing his poems. A little time is left before the divorce is granted by the court and Samiran makes a few short trips with his wife Manashi. The trips bring old memories back; the memories that have shaped him emotionally and given the resolve to carve out his poems from. Though a very sensitive person, Samiran is at the same time aloof from his surroundings. Samiran goes through another tough phase when his father is identified as being involved in a financial scam. He has seen, suffered and felt life. He takes a retreat to a remote village to discover his roots, the deeper meaning of his life. Unaware of his whereabouts and a looming prison sentence, his father decides to celebrate his birthday. Bibhas recites the poem that Samiran has titled as 'Baibhab' meaning wealth. It is revealed that the multifarious sweet and sour memories that in fact left him a richer man, much richer than the wealth that can be measured.

Anya Ek Yatra (2001): The film narrates the story of a young man, Vikram, who takes recourse to crime to avenge society's wrong doing of his father. Vikram is the eldest child of Dr Bidhan Saikia, who has been forced to retire due to an unsuccessful surgery. He is put behind bars and his career as a medical practitioner comes to a halt. Vikram who works as a cashier in a bank plans to rob the bank's money and use it to finance his father's research. To make his plans real, Vikram involves an extremist group and comes under the scanner of the police. But things turn to worse when he decides to deceive his accomplices and keep the money for himself. As he is chased by the police as well as the extremist group, his family undergoes many hardships including constant questioning by the police. However, in a dramatic turn of events, Vikram realizes his folly and decides to surrender to the police but is killed by the extremists for betraying them.

Akashitorar Kothare (2003): The film '*Akashitorar Kothare*' (Tale Told a Thousand Times) opens with Akashitora, the protagonist lying on a hospital bed being watched upon by an elderly gentleman. The high angle camera shot is an indicator of her extremely vulnerable health. It may also be seen to mark the hopelessness and insignificance of the protagonist's existence and struggle against a force that is much bigger than her. The film then goes back into a flashback and shows Akashitora with the elderly gentleman who is her *Tawoi (uncle)*. As a university student, she starts her research into the sacrifices made by women and the general sense of apathy shown towards them by the patriarchal society. Here is a society where the women try hard and sacrifice a lot to gain a foothold, to assert their identity. Akashitora's mother is worried as she believes that the first priority was to get her daughter married. On the other hand Akashi's father and uncle are elated by her decision and makes fun of her mother. Akashi enjoys her research work visiting many interior places of Assam and interacting with people. She is enraged at the old traditions and customs objectification of women is not unusual and put them as subject to the desire of men. She is also angry at the customs that have wronged them and have taken their individual identity away from them. In the process of her research work she meets and marries Raghav Choudhury, a government official. Marriage and family gradually takes place of priority and Akashi's research relegated to the background. After the birth of her first child her passion for research is wiped out. She now has to be the loving wife, the obedient daughter-in-law and the dotting mother. Her husband does not approve of her desire to start her research work again; all that he wants her to do is be his wife. Gradually their relationship gets entangled in the complicacies and stress of professional and personal space. Her children move away for their studies and there is no one to lessen the burden her lonely life. Like the story of many household she becomes a silent sufferer. Raghav's dominance over her life and decision takes a toll on her health. In a fit of rage over Raghav's overriding decision, Akashitora collapses and leaves the fate to death, repeating the story of many of her kind and like.

Laaz (2004): The film traces the life of a little girl, Ila who is a brilliant student. Ila is from an impoverished family that can barely make its ends meet. Ila however, helps her parents with the chores and manages to study for school much to the delight to her teachers. But the crisis in the family deepens as both her parents fall ill. The film relates to the struggles that the little girl goes through. Even the trivial necessities like a piece of soap to wash her dress cannot be fulfilled. Ila cannot attend school regularly due to her other responsibilities at home. After her mother passes away and her father's health deteriorates Ila is also entrusted with the responsibilities of earning for the family. Her exams approach and the school authorities expect a good outcome. However, Ila is left with little time to look into her books. Despite her brilliance and eagerness to learn, Ila is left helpless. When her friends attend school and plays, she catches fish and sells them in the market. Her long stretch of absence concerns her teachers and they go looking for her. On enquiry, she reveals that she does not proper clothing to wear to school. The film ends with a freeze frame as her teachers are left in shock.

The question of shame is directed towards the audience as the film exposes basic human suffering. The film questions the society that is unable to protect the dreams and hopes of a little girl. The viewers are left pondering on the question of shame; is the little girl shy due to her lack of proper clothing or must the onlookers be ashamed at their state loss of conscience.

Joymati (2006): Manju Borah reprises the tale of the brave Ahom princess Joymati in this film. The film opens with a brief historical account of the settlement of the Ahoms in the plains of Assam. The vast Ahom kingdom was plagued by internal politics in the 17th century with a handful of courtiers governing the people with a young king on throne. While the courtiers devised a coup to kill or maim all other princes, Joymati pleaded with her husband to flee the country. She believed that the courtiers have provided the kingdom a wrong direction which only a powerful king can change and her husband can be the person to ascend the throne. Joymati went through tortures and scarified her life to ensure that her husband and the future king's whereabouts remain secret.

While the story of brave princess has been told time and again through various medium this film is a second attempt to narrate her tale through the celluloid.

Aai Kot Nai (Ma) (2008): The film revolves around the border disputes of Assam and Nagaland narrates the tales of people caught in the political differences. The film opens with a village *bhaona*⁶ festival being disrupted by blazing houses. Property is damaged and lives are lost as tragedy struck the unsuspecting villagers. Misunderstanding about the border is the only reason for growing hostility between the Assamese and the Naga villagers. As the tragedy strikes young and old, the film moves back and forth in times to narrate the tales of the people living in the two neighbouring villages. While there are issues that the government and civil servants try to solve, people of the two villages mingle. The film explores the result of human hatred and desire for drawing lines for periphery of power. While a few youths are overpowered by these desires, others try to live in the brotherhood of trust and love. As a result of the violence, a young girl loses her beloved, a man his mother and a mother her son. The film ends with the discovery of the baby boy that was believed to be charred in fire. The baby is being nurtured by a Naga woman. The director leaves with a strong message that despite hatred and human weaknesses, love and compassion triumphs.

⁶ Traditional Assamese folk drama form developed by Vaishnavite saint Shrimanta Shankardeva. *Bhaonas* narrate various episodes from the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana and are performed by elaborately dressed actors.