MAPPING A CRITICAL HISTORY OF ODIA CINEMA: A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

A thesis submitted during (2018) to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the award of a Ph.D. degree in Gender Studies, Centre for Women's Studies

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“Mapping A Critical History of Odia Cinema”** submitted by **Adyasha Dash** bearing **Regd. No. 10CWPG03** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in **Gender Studies** is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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A. Published in the following publication:

1. Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies (ISSN Number2321-8819), Chapter V

And

B. Presented in the following conference:

1. Women’s Worlds Congress, (International)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With a deep sense of gratitude, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Deepa Sreenivas for her constructive ideas, suggestions, support and criticisms that enriched me as a researcher. She became the friend, philosopher and guide at the time of need. I am obliged for her much needed help and continuous encouragement in the most difficult phases.

I am grateful to my doctoral committee members Prof. Tutun Mukherjee and Dr. M.N. Rajesh for their valuable suggestions and encouragements. I express my gratitude to Prof. K. Sunitha Rani for her support and encouragement. I would like to thank Prof. Rekha Pande, H.O.D, Centre for Women's Studies for her cooperation and encouragement. I would like to thank all the previous joint faculties of the centre Ajailu Madam, Sita Madam, Jyoti Madam, Rajashri Madam, Vindu Madam for all their kind words and encouragement.

Thanks to all the office staffs of the Centre for Women's Studies, especially Prasad for all the support and cooperation. I would like to thank all the staffs of administrative office, IGM library, anti-plagiarism checks offices for their cooperation.

I obliged to all the eminent film personalities for their time and support. Especially Jharana Das, Late Sarat Pujari, film journalists Surya Deo, Ashok Palit and Dillip Hali. I would like to thank Satyakam Pattnaik for all his help and support without which the interviews would not have been completed.

I am grateful to all the staffs of the Pune Film Archive, Odisha state Archive and state library for their cooperation.

I am indebted to Shraddha and Aisarya for all their help and support at the time of need.

I would like to thank all my friends Arpita, Tanaya, Ramya, Ila, Suchitra, Dutta, Bagmi, Kavita, Sasmita, Sharmistha, Priyanka, Seema, Archana, Shatabdi, Nagina, Pratima, Rajendra and Vineetha for all their love and care at the time of difficulties.

I am indebted to my parents for their constant believe and support, my sister Amrita and brother Anshuman who stood like strong pillars when needed. My baby who continuously helped me to be patient and strengthen me to overcome all the difficulties. Without their support, this work would not have been completed.

I would also like to thank my respondents for their cooperation, timely help and for uncomplainingly answering my queries.

Lastly, I must thank the God Almighty for giving me strength and patience to overcome all the hurdles and completing the thesis.

Thanks to all of you from the bottom of my heart for being there with me when I needed.

Adyasha

Table of Contents

Chapter I

Introduction: Gender, Society and Odia Cinema: An Overview 1
Section I 5
Section II...30

Chapter II

A Review of Literature: Frames and Approaches...36

Chapter III

Re-forming ‘Woman’: the 1960s...47
Section I 48
Section II...62

Chapter IV

Re-consolidating the Family: The Turbulent 70s 76
Section I 80
Section II...83

Chapter V

Regulating Feminist Questions and Re-fashioning Femininity: The Eighties and Nineties 101
Section I 102
Section II..107

Chapter VI

Conclusion: From ‘Authentic’ Odia identity to the ‘Remake Era’.............129
Section I 131
Section II..147
Bibliography 152

Chapter I

Introduction: Gender, Society and Odia Cinema: An Overview

Cinema plays a major role in shaping the society. It has a great impact on the lives of the people. It is not only an important source of entertainment, but also is a medium that is accessible by all groups of society. As Ashish Rajadhyakshya (1987, 47) has pointed out in his discussion of Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), Indian cinema acquired a reach that was never before possible and only occasionally envisaged by purveyors of the popular. Traditional forms of entertainment like mythological performances were transformed by the modern technology of the moving image. Irrespective of class, it became accessible by all the group of the society. According to Anil Saari (2009, 7), 'Cinema not only became the new arena of folk theatre, it went further and introduced a new religious pantheon of gods, goddess and priests. It destroyed the old and made common people look at themselves, rather than at superior beings'. Saari (2009, 7) further suggests that the generally shunned culture of a colloquial, irreverent, local versions of the epics that the folk performers had created were now revisited and transferred to a different setting—'in palace like edifices in the very centre of the rich minority's city'. The admission to these spectacles was cheap; it was open to anyone who had money in the pocket to buy a cinema ticket. For a large mass of people, the film emerged as a liberating force, setting one free from the dogmas, deprivations and oppression of morality and religion in the real world (Saari 2009, 7). Saari asserts that the history of the Indian feature film since its beginning in 1912 is in fact a ‘history of rediscovery, by the Indian city, of folk theatre’ (2009, 7).

In his path-breaking essay ‘The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional form and Modern Technology’ Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1987) discusses how the modern technology of cinema is combined with traditional performance styles in Dadasaheb Phalke’s films to convey *swadesi* themes and images. Phalke was bent upon carrying out the task of making films despite the lack of financial support. The conviction that drove him was that ‘the Indian people would get an occasion to see Indian images on the screen and people abroad would get a true picture of India’ (Rajadhyaksha 1987, 47). Early Indian cinema is a complex combination of mythological images, traditional narrative styles with the codes of realist representation, adopted from the west.

Cinema always has had a remarkable influence on social norms concerning gender, race, class, nationality and other factors that constitute identity. As Saari (2009, 7) puts it:

> The popularity of cinema in India is not accidental. It became a symbol of industrialization of the new world society, as India sought to transform itself and enter the twentieth century. Indeed, the cinema theatre became the new temple. In the tradition of religious cultural events such as the Ram Lila—the dramatic enactment of the story of the Ramayana—Janmashtami—the celebration of the birth of Krishna—and other festivals such as Holi and Diwali, cinema gave a sense of collective to a people

> bred as ciphers in a tight-knit community living in the very heart of industrialization, and its dehumanizing effects.

During the early 20th Century, cinema in India combined a social agenda with mythological themes. The film makers endeavoured to market the dreams and aspirations of ordinary people through the medium of cinema and hoped to receive legitimate and reliable finance from the government or from powerful wealthy groups. In this way there was power and dependency from both the sides. As Prasad (1998, 30) cites, ‘to focus on economic questions relating to the industry is not simply to ‘flesh out’ the background to cultural production but to uncover the nature of the nexus between economic, ideological and political forces that shape the conditions of possibility of cultural production in India’. Prasad’s argument about the dominant form of Bombay cinema after independence largely holds true for Odia and perhaps other regional cinemas as well. While the films are produced in a post-independence and democratic state, the economy and culture are still dominated by feudal elements. This is reflected in the form and content of most films as they inevitably end in a re-establishment of the patriarchal family—its equilibrium and status quo. For example, the wayward son would come back to the fold of the family or the individualistic daughter-in-law would be repentant and reformed. Prasad (1998) calls it the ‘feudal family romance’. In the cinemas of different regions during the early period, one can see a nexus among financiers, producers, directors and those in political power. My discussion of Odia cinema hopefully will point to this trend. For now, let me briefly refer to Mrinal Sen’s celebrated *Matira Manisha* (‘Man of the Soil’, 1966) as an example, where the benevolent elder brother acts as the moral force to regulate and define the actions of his wife and also his ‘selfish’ younger brother and his individualistic wife. But

Mrinal Sen identified the daughter-in-law as the ‘outsider’ in this setting where she is treated with indifference and moral contempt (‘On the making of Matira Manisha’, Indiancine.ma, accessed May, 2018, http://indiancine.ma/documents/BEE). With a perceptive eye and unconventional point of view, Sen looked at the daughter-in-law with empathy even though it was mainly the story of an upstanding and sacrificing patriarch.

Cinema is an important popular-cultural medium through which the dominant classes negotiate consent for their ideological positions. In its early moment, in India in general but also in Odisha, it was largely controlled by the landowning elite (often formerly landlords or dominant feudal figures) groups which controlled the means of production. As a majority of the films were and are financed and produced by the privileged classes, the content often reflects their cultural aspirations and social and religious values. As we shall see, the very first Odia film *Sita Bibaha*, released in 1936, is steeped in the cultural ethos of the centre of Jagannath culture, Puri. Unfortunately, no print of this film survives. However, even in the latter films we shall find a great impact of middle class notions of tradition as well as reform.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section maps the broad cultural and historical contexts within which I situate Odia cinema. While I will focus on the films from the 60s onwards in this thesis, I begin by drawing below a brief sketch of the initial struggles of Odia cinema to indicate the search for an Odia identity in its nascent moment. This ‘Odia identity’ manifests itself in popular cinema in different ways in subsequent phases, pressed into the consolidation of normative values of the middle class. This section has several sub-sections under different headings: (1) Odia cinema: the early struggles, (2) Odia identity, Jagannatha culture, gender, (3) Culture, state, cinema, (4) *Gruhalakshmi*: preserver of the patriarchal family, (5) Gendered socialization and the female protagonist, and (6) Odia cinema: the 60s and after.

Section II of this chapter deals with the broad research hypothesis and the objectives of the study and its rationale, methodologies and approaches adopted, difficulties and challenges of this research and the chapter schema.

Section I

Odia cinema: the Early Struggles

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Indian middle class increasingly articulates a nationalist challenge to colonial rule but simultaneously consolidates the hierarchies based on caste and gender. In early cinema of various Indian languages as much as in other visual and cultural mediums we see a complex response to colonialism. This is nationalist at one level, but it also represents an upper caste middle class worldview as universal. Cultural historian Geeta Kapur (1989) has drawn attention to how Ravi Varma adopted the oil painting medium to paint 'Indian' figures. At the same time, these figures became 'types', reflecting his aspiration as a colonized artist to represent an ideal Indian figure. As Kapur (1989, 7) puts it, 'The past is the present clad in actual flesh and blood and costume'. So in Ravi Varma's painting the aristocratic Nair woman or the 'Aryan' woman emerges as a prototype for all women.

My research indicates that a parallel trend takes place in Odia cinema which is inaugurated with the film *Sita Bibaha* ('Sita's Wedding', 1936). The film comes on the heels of the eponymous Telugu film *Sita Kalyanam* in 1934. Obviously there is a popular market for films based on mythological themes, a trend inaugurated by the films of Phalke. Unfortunately, the sole reel of the first Odia film was destroyed in a fire accident. Below I attempt to piece together some details of the making and reception of the film from available records.[1]

Odia film production started with the enterprise of an individual. The pioneer of Odia cinema was Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami. His forefathers were the immigrants hailing from the Nadiya district in Bengal. They were so influenced by Jagannath culture that they decided to settle in Puri. This family was well-known among the people of Odisha as the initiators of Vaishnava culture. Since childhood Goswami was engaged in prayers, dance, song etc. He had a troupe in Puri named ‘Shri Radha Kunjabihari Rasa Party’ which travelled to different places of India and was known for its performances.

During this period there was a dramatic club in Puri known as Jagannath club. Most of the art-loving educated people were part of it. Goswami was also a part of it. The club took initiative in staging different types of Bengali and Odia drama. At that time an English talkative film was being exhibited in Calcutta. Some of the members of this group went to watch that film and got highly influenced by it. In 1931, when the first talkative Indian film *Alam Ara* released, one of the members of the club, Sirish Chandra Ghosh encouraged Goswami to make a film as he had a cultural troupe. Goswami with his troupe went to Calcutta to meet Priyanath Gangully who was his student and the owner of Kali films in Calcutta. He agreed with Goswami’s proposal but told him to sign new actors outside of his regular performing group. After coming back to Puri, Mr. Goswami discussed with others about a probable theme for a mythological film which would be appreciated by all. Finally, *Sita Bibaha*, a play written by Kampal Mishra in 1899, got selected to be made into a film. The finance was arranged by Gangully. But, the major problem was finding actresses. At that time acting was considered as a very derogatory job, especially for women. People from 'respectable' social background were not supposed to do acting. Even men were not allowed to do so. As we know, even prostitutes had not agreed to act in Dadasaheb Phalke's first film *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and finally men were hired to play the female roles. So one can imagine how difficult it was for Goswami to find an actress who would play the role of Sita. After searching a lot, Shrimati Prabhabati Devi of Cuttack got selected as Sita. A lawer named Makhanlal Banerjee was chosen for the role of Ram. Adaitya Vallabh Mohanty, a doctor by profession, was chosen for the role of Lakshman. After selection of all the artists, Mr. Gangully proposed to draft an agreement between the group of actors and Mr. Goswami (Singh 2008). Below I provide an image of this early document included in (Singh 2008) to provide a sense of its elaborateness and historical value. I also provide a short summary of the main clauses following the image.

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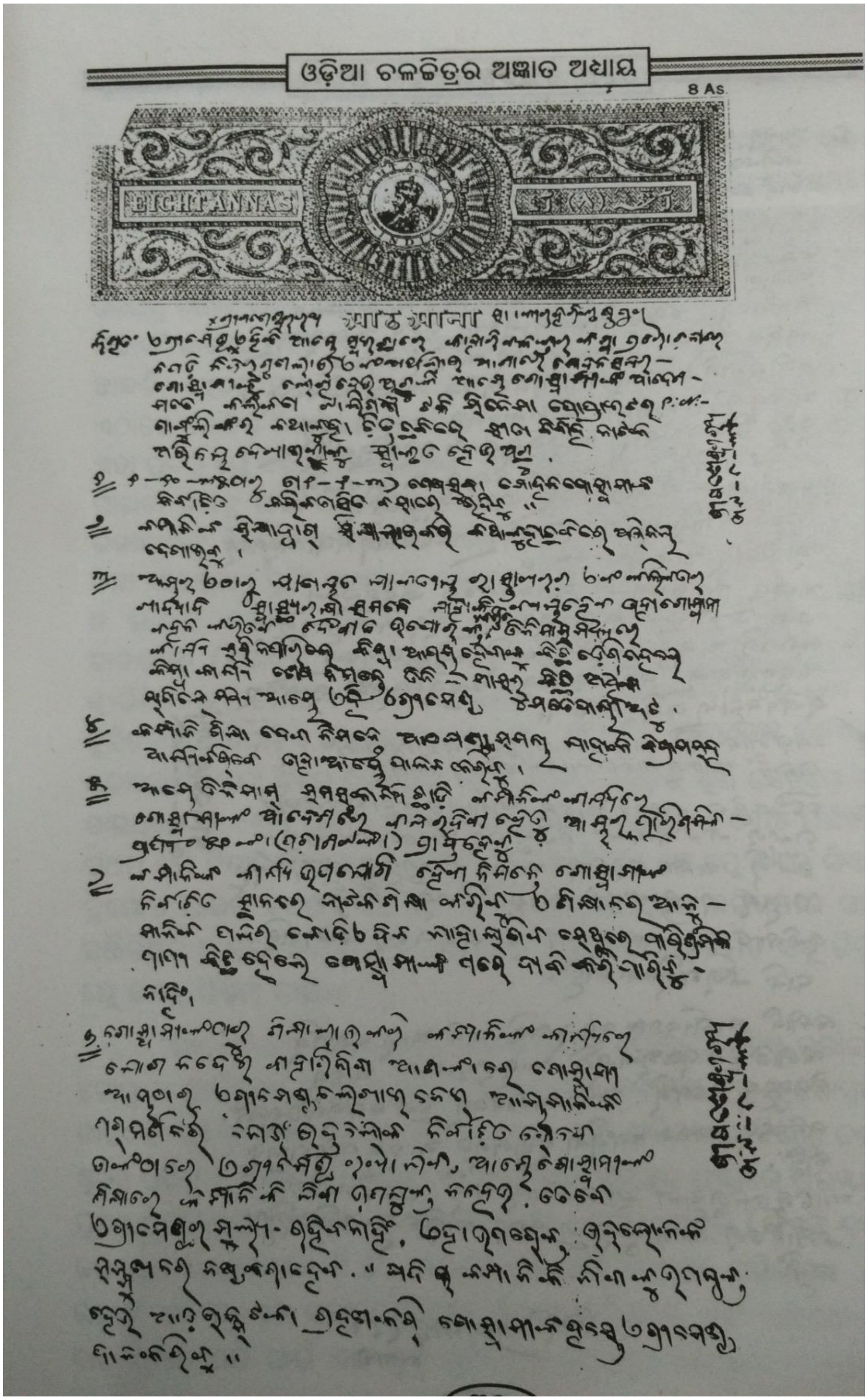
[1] For this part of the section, I draw mainly on the very critical work by Bhim Singh (2008) titled *Odia Chalachitrara Agyanta Adhyay* (‘The Forgotten Chapter of Odia Cinema’) for sketching the historical information about the initial phase of Odia cinema, given below. I have also referred to Rajadhyaksha and Willeman (1994).



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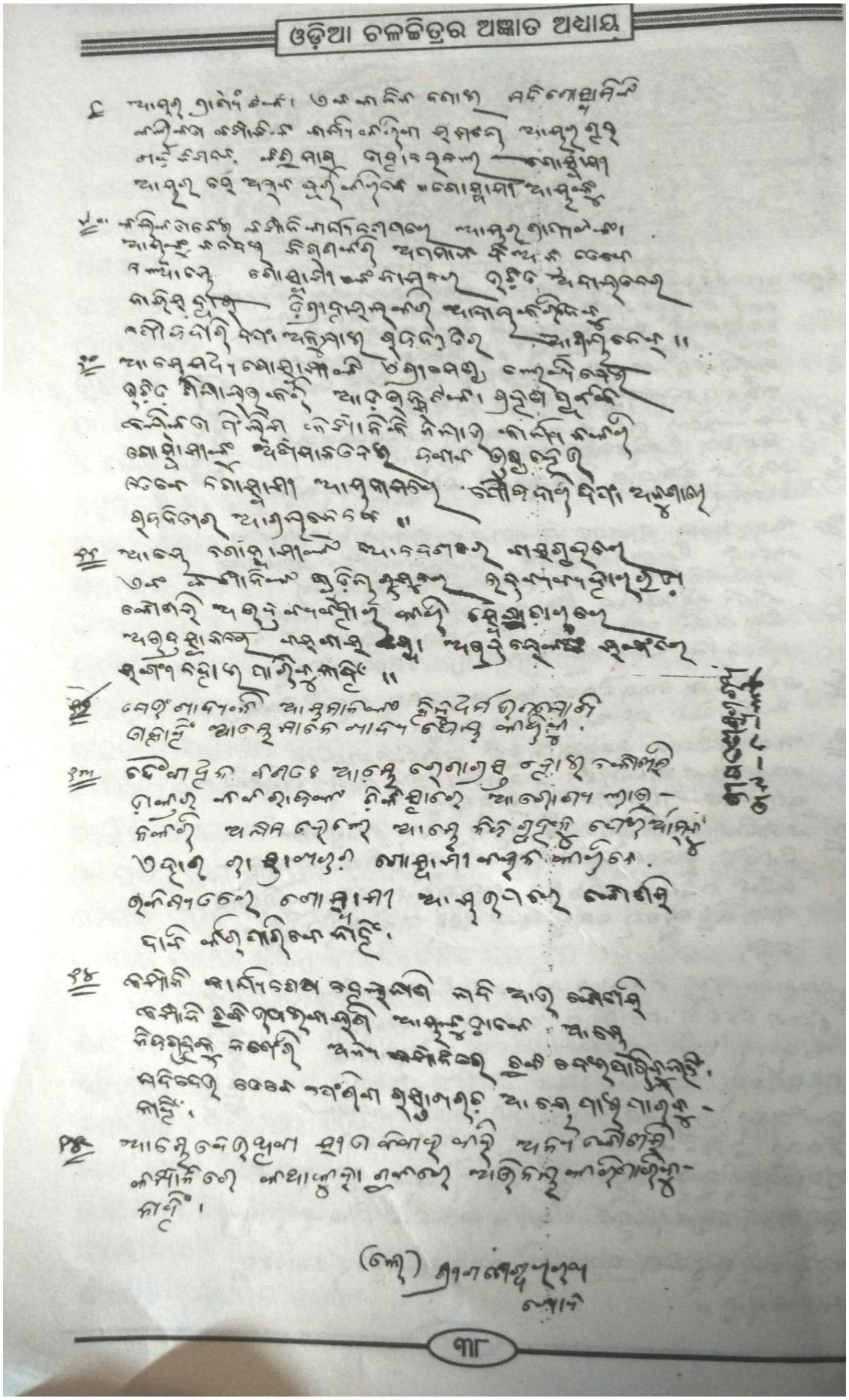
(Picture Courtesy: Bhim Singh,2008)



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(Picture Courtesy: Bhim Singh, 2008)

According to the agreement that was drafted, the artists had to stay in Calcutta from 1st January 1935 to 1st January 1936 for the purpose of completion of the film. The transportation, daily allowances and health allowance was to be borne by Mr. Goswami and the individuals were to be paid remunerations ranging from Rs. 30 to 100 according to their roles. The actors would have to train for about a month under Goswami, preparing for their parts in the film. The manuscript of the film was not to be handed over to any other company for the purpose of making any other film. One of the clauses interestingly states that the actors must eat only food that is permitted as per Hindu religion during the period of training and acting in the film.

Though it was mentioned in the agreement that the film was made by Kali films production house, Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami was acknowledged as the producer and director of the film. The film got released in 28th April 1936 in Laxmi talkies of Puri. At that time there were only two cinema theatres in Cuttack. One was Ekmi theatre which was within the boundary of the famous Annapurna B theatre group. Chandra Kishore Das who was a popular motor mechanic and business man was the owner of this theatre. Later he sold this to Haladhara Mukherjee of Calcutta and the theatre became ‘Halmukh’ theatre after to his name. Another theatre named as ‘Cinema Palace’ was in an old radio station. Mr. Francis, its owner, was a Kerala Christian and a motor mechanic by profession. Both the theatres mentioned above were screening Hindi, Bengali and English films. English films were screened on the demand of the British.

None of these theatres were interested to screen *Sita Bibaha* as it was the first ever Odia film and there was no existing market. Eventually Chameria studio of Calcutta screened it on the rear wall of Cuttack municipal office. Many people came from villages to see how the pictures were talking. At that time, men sat in front of the screen while the women sat behind the screen. So women could only see the rear view of images on the screen. Chameria studio was a touring studio and Radhakrishna Chameria was its owner. He was also the owner of Radha films studio in Calcutta (Singh, 2008).

Another theatre was built by the king of Jaipur, Shri Vikram Dev Verma. As an art-loving patron, he built a studio named as Vikram studio in 1933 in Jaipur as Jaipur was nearer to South India and he hoped that it would encourage South Indian film makers to make Odia films. However, only a few Telugu films were made in this studio and the dream of the king to make Odia films was not fulfilled.

The disruptions and conflicts on the set of *Sita Bibaha* and also the difficulty of screening discouraged other producers from making Odia films. At that time the well-known labour leader Nishakar Panda who was settled in Calcutta started a group named ‘Utkal Theatre Niketan’. The group was meant to take forward Odia theatre. He tried to make a film from the play ‘Konark’. He took Mr. Balaichand Banerjee as director of the film as he had good relationship with all the princely states of Odisha, which would help in gathering finance for the film. But due to the death of his wife and his own illness he eventually returned to Odisha and the plan did not work out (Singh 2008).

As the above brief sketching of the early attempts to make Odia films indicate, in the initial stage, the studios and film exhibition domains are determined and sustained by Odia/Bengali largely upper caste financiers or Odia royal patrons. The success of some of the films like *Sita Bibaha* (1936), *Shri Jagannath* (1950), *Amari Gaan Jhia* (1953) gave hope to interested filmmakers to produce more films in Odia language.

Odia Identity, Jagannatha Culture, Gender

One can clearly see an investment in building an Odia cultural identity right from the initial moment in Odia cinema with *Sita Bibaha*. For instance, all the singers for the movie were from Odisha and Mohan Sundar drew from traditional music of the land in the film. A lot of care went into choosing the settings of the songs and dances, drawing from Odia performance traditions. As we know, in 1936, Odisha was recognized as a separate linguistic state. As Chakra (2014, 63) points out:

> Thus, this was the time for the quest for Odia identity by the Odia people in their social, political and cultural contexts, and out of it was born their dream to make films in the Odia language. The first Odia film was released on 28 April at Laxmi Cinema hall in Puri, just twenty-seven days after the birth of Odisha state.

Completely shot at Kali Film studio, Tollygunj, Calcutta, this film as we have seen was a realization of Mohan Sundar's dream at a time when Odisha had no cinematographic technology at its disposal. As an online site that takes pride in Odia culture states: '*Sita Bibaha* was the first complete Odia film and an important part of the struggle for a manifestation of Odia cultural identity in celluloid form' ('Sita Bibaha (1936) Oriya Movie Songs, Release Date, Caste, Budget', Incredible Orissa, April 28, 2018, *http://incredibleorissa.com/sita-bibaha/*).

It is important to note that at this moment of the beginning of Odia cinema itself, the idea of Odia culture is tied to Puri upper caste Jagannath culture. The first two films, *Sita Bibaha* and *Sri Jagannath* have mythological themes, tied to the gods and practices of the brahmin castes. This points to the historical affiliation of Odia cinema with the Jagannath culture.

I believe that right from the first film *Sita Bibaha*, Jagannath culture serves as a backdrop for Odia identity and culture. Like the early proponents of Odia nationalism, the producers and other prominent film personalities mainly belong to the upper castes. Hence, as Mohanty (1990) and Dash (1978) have discussed, the tribal lineages of the Jagannatha cult are either not part of this version of Odia identity and culture, or are appropriated. Even continuing into the 50s, as Chakra (2013, 65) has pointed out:

> The 1950s also witnessed the birth of the first-ever cooperative moment in Odia cinema besides the decentralization of filmmaking at Cuttack. Kabiraj Krushnachandra Tripathy Sharma, a trained ayurvedic doctor who was also known as an eminent politician, social organizer and propagator of the cooperative movement, established Utkal Chalachitra Pratisthan, a cooperative society to produce films, at Aska in the Ganjam district in South Odisha in 1958. He also set up the first-ever film hall in the town through the society and in 1959 produced a successful popular film, *Mahalakshmi Puja* (Worshipping Goddess Lakshmi), based on a popular mythological story.

One can detect a connection between the patrons and focus of the films, the very titles reflecting dominant ritual worships and practices and ethos. Simultaneously there is a reformist thrust which undercuts and critiques this hegemony—in Hindi cinema and other regional cinemas of the 50s—depicting social evils and the need to eradicate them in films such as *Amari Gaan Jhia* (‘A Girl from Our Village’, 1953) and *Bhai Bhai*

(‘Brothers’,1958). In fact, *Bhai Bhai* which deals with the romance between a Brahmin man and an ‘untouchable’ woman pre-dates Bimal Roy’s celebrated film *Sujata* (1959) in Hindi which has a similar theme. This may be attributed to the progressive worldview of its noted director, Nitai Palit (1923-1990), known for his progressive and socialist orientation. He was the vice president of the Odisha chapter of the IPTA (Indian People’s Theatre Association).[2]

Manoranjan Mohanty (1990) has also insightfully brought out the connection between Jagannath culture and the upper strata of Odia society. According to him (1990, 356-57) upper caste domination in Odisha is not only due to political and economic advantages but also because of cultural hegemony, and ‘at the centre of this symbol lies the Jagannath cult’. He argues that the Jagannath culture had grown out of an appropriation of tribal deities for the legitimation of royal and upper caste power.

> The Jagannath cult has remained not only the dominant cultural symbol of Orissa, but also an instrument of legitimation of dominance by the upper classes, and the upper castes. (Mohanty, 358)

G. N. Dash (1978) has also elaborated the strong connection between Jagannath and Odia nationalism in the 19th and 20th century. According to him, Indian nationalism in pre-independence Odisha was subsumed under Odia nationalism of which the symbol was Jagannath. Many of the noted poets and writers of the 19th century such as Ramasankar Ray and Radhanath Ray assigned a prominent place to Lord Jagannath in their writings. In the 20th century, well known educationists and writers like Gopabandhu Das and Nilakantha Das were greatly influenced by Jagannath culture, and in their mind there was no contradiction between Indian nationalism and Odia nationalism. While this propelled the demand for a separate linguistic state, it also consolidated a uniform idea of Jagannatha, appropriating the earlier tribal lineages of the deity.[3]

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[2] To cite how Palit is mentioned in Rajadhyaksha and Willemen’s Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema (1994, 169): ‘Best known Oriya director, born in Cuttack. Playwright and theatrical producer; vice-president of the IPTA’s Utkal branch. Started in film as actor (Vinay Bannerjee’s Amari Gaan Jhua, 1953), then directed Kedar Gouri, a tragic love story. Broke through with Malajanha, based on Upendra Das’s novel, featuring the Oriya star Jharana Das. Admires the Bengali masters Ray, Ghatak and Sen’.

While the print of *Sita Bibaha* does not exist today, based on surrounding documents and evidences, one can claim that there was a clear impact of Odia nationalism and Jagannath culture on early Odia cinema. This cultural influence, inseparable from upper caste cultures, remains dominant in cinema of the 60s and subsequently.

Culture, State, Cinema

Mainstream cinema acts as a crucial vehicle of the dominant ideology of the state. While India is not homogeneous in terms of its people and social milieus, culture is the site where a battle for hegemony takes place. As Sumita S. Chakravarty (1993, 20) has analyzed, 'Indian nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru conducting a war of independence, as well nineteenth-century poets, saints, and social reformers trying to unify the country prior to that effort, attacked separatists identities and argued for what might be called a "boundaryless" conception of identity, a pan-Indian consciousness. While not

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3 Dash (1978, 373) has further stated: 'Even the advocates of Indian nationalism in Orissa did not ignore or forget the historic tie existing between the Oriyas and Lord Jagannatha. This is because, many of them…were primarily committed to Oriya nationalism and in their hearts remained committed to it even after their conversion to the cause of Indian nationalism. To them the contradiction between the two forces did not exist and they were supplementary in nature.'

denying the importance of regional affiliations, they stressed nationalism as appropriate to the needs of the moment'. Thus, the hegemonic nationalist groups worked towards representing certain values as universal and negotiating consent for dominant worldviews and beliefs in the site of culture. However, what is represented as 'boundaryless' is deeply conflict-ridden by the fault lines of caste, class and community. In the newly independent state, cinema negotiates the social and cultural questions the nation is faced with. It carries the task to actively participate in the construction of modernity which is the marker of an independent nation-state.

Significantly at this moment, women become the embodiment of moral and cultural values and yet, simultaneously need to be presented as modern and not oppressed by pre-modern feudal norms. As Partha Chatterjee (1989) has discussed in an influential essay, in 19th century Bengal, it was critical for the emergent *bhadralok* class that the identity of 'woman' be re-imagined. While it was important for men to enter the public, material domain in order to compete with the colonizer, the sanctity of home/culture was to be maintained by the woman. She became the repository of the spiritual. Thus, in the middle class, upper caste discourse of 19th century Bengal, a split between home and world becomes central.

One finds that the home-world, spiritual-material split still remains a critical factor in post independence films. However, they reflect a tension between women as professional or free individuals and their role as domestic beings. The resolutions are interesting. In an insightful analysis of the film *Andaaz* (1949), Ravi Vasudevan (1996, 104) writes: 'The film preceded a trend in the cinema of the early 1950s which carried traces of Indian women as professionals but then erased these in order to foreground masculine activities and romantic fulfilment.' In *Andaaz*, the female protagonist played by Nargis is punished for her transgressions into the world outside of the feminine domain (horse riding, unrestrained laughter and behaviour) and attraction for a man who is not her husband. In *Awaara* (1951) Rita, the heroine (once again played by Nargis) is a lawyer but ultimately becomes the moral force that reforms the hero, Raj. Her professional self recedes after she defends Raj in the court where he is convicted.

Control over female sexuality is important to mark the identity of the nation as Hindu. Somnath Zutshi (1993, 90) argues that Hindus segregated their women and remained in fear of being overwhelmed by female sexuality. They thus created an inordinate number of structures and strictures to control this omnipotent sexuality. Uma Chakravarti (1995) has also discussed how the death of the husband meant social and sexual death for the widow in the 19th century, as her sexuality was threatening. According to Chatterjee (1993, 9):

> The domain of the family and the position of women underwent considerable change in the world of the nationalist middle class. It was undoubtedly a new patriarchy that was brought into existence, different from the "traditional order" but also explicitly claiming to be different from the "Western" family. The "new woman" was to be modern, but she would also have to display the signs of national tradition and therefore would be essentially different from the "Western" woman.

Further, the 'new woman' was to be differentiated from the 'unrestrained' western woman on the one hand and the 'vulgar' lower caste woman on the other.

Against this backdrop, I attempt to show how the cinema of Odisha during the post-independence era is influenced by the modernizing ideology of the Nehruvian state on the one hand and a desire to represent a specific Odia identity and culture on the other. The earliest Odia cinema, though few and far between, did represent the nascent attempt to carve an Odia identity as we have seen in the case of *Sita Bibaha*. However, Odia cinema comes into its own during the sixties, both in terms of the number of films produced and the acclaim and recognition they receive. Films like *Malajanha* ('Dead Moon', 1965), *Amada Bata* ('The Untrodden Path', 1964), *Abhinetri* ('Actress', 1965) revolved around the themes of women caught in dilemmas between tradition and modern, individual desire and societal obligations. These films reflect 'progressive', 'modern' values without radically challenging the 'core' Odia values. For example, *Malajanha* depicts a tragic love story narrated in the setting of rural Odisha, caught under the yoke of superstitions, narrow caste prejudices and poverty. Women in this community are treated like objects with no mind and choice of their own, and child marriages are widely prevalent. The agony and suffering of Sati, the central female character, is presented as the consequence of 'social evils' of rural Odia society. Set against this background, the film has a reformist narrative. These films demonstrate very interesting struggles between women's desires and social norms.

Here, it may be pointed out that Bengali cinema, especially Bengali directors with left ideology were a great influence on the Odia cinema of the 60s and the 70s. The well-known director of Bengali cinema, Mrinal Sen directed *Matira Manisha* ('Man of the Soil', 1966) which won the national award for best actor for the popular Odia hero, Prashanta Nanda. The subsequent films of 80s and 90s show us some glimpses of unusual women, bold and sometimes ready to avenge a rapist or a goon. But they are ultimately subsumed under the category of 'ideal Odia woman', and emerge as respectful of tradition and elders and the norms of the joint family.

An increasingly conservative ideology comes into play in the Odia films of 90s, perhaps impacted by the rising Hindutva ideology of the time. This is also the period when Odia films show the growing influence of films from Bombay or Bollywood and later on by Telugu films.

Gruhalakshmi: Preserver of the Patriarchal Family

Representation of women is closely linked to the historical moment within which a film is made and its various ideological contexts. The relation between upper caste and lower caste women, the position of the upper castes and lower castes, the difference between the status of men and women and the economic and cultural conditions within which gender norms are located is reflected in cinema. As Karl Marx asserted in *The German Ideology* (1974, 243): 'The class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production'. In Indian cinema the positioning of woman is connected to the shifting contexts of patriarchy and the demands of nation-building. Perhaps *Mother India* (1957) is the greatest example of this. The female protagonist Radha is the moral force around which the narratives of nationalism, state and development are deployed. She is the ultimate symbol of sacrifice and chastity, and is willing to sacrifice her beloved son to protect the moral order of the village/nation. Vasudevan (2011) has analyzed that while the mother in *Mother India* has emotional authority, she does not carry the legal/State authority of the father as in *Awara* (1951). In fact, her emotional and moral superiority is pressed into the service of the newly independent State that must control criminal/deviant elements such as the dacoit—in this case her own son, Birju. Despite her great love for him, she kills him for the greater good.

One finds strong traces of 'Mother India' in the representation of women in the Odia cinema of the 60s as well, and continuing for three decades afterwards. However, in the Odia context, the idea of Mother India is contained in the regional ethos, influenced by the Odia upper caste norm where a woman is expected to be obedient, hard-working, self-sacrificing, modest and completely centred around family. After marriage a bride would be expected to adjust in the in-law's home in all circumstances.

One can trace the dominant notion of Odia womanhood to the nationalist reform movement in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. During this period the question of women's education was discussed and debated at length but always in relation to the tasks and roles of upper caste, middle class women. The idea of education for women was very different from that of men—it was meant to enhance their domestic skills and values rather than prepare them for roles in the public sphere. It was also meant to distinguish her from lower caste, working women. As Biswal (2009, 89) points out, 'The motherhood role and image of woman as 'gruhalakshmi' was articulated, where women's education was expected to result in producing healthy, caring mothers with knowledge of health and hygiene'. Alongside the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Odisha witnessed the Odia identity movement—a movement geared to inculcate Odia pride and to mark Odia identity as distinct from Bengali identity. As Biswal (2009) has discussed, in this scenario, Odia womanhood became a critical point of discussion at two levels. One, the virtues of motherhood were valorized in keeping with the nationalist discourse. Two, middle class Odia women's virtues and embodied practices were projected as superior to those of the Bengali middle class women. So, during this period, while there is an emphasis and focus on women's education, it is intended to shape them as ideal mothers and wives. Early women's magazines of the late nineteenth century in Odisha such as *Asha* reiterate this again and again from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Drawing extensively on such magazines, Biswal (2009) has discussed some of the prominent issues that emerged: the need for women's education, the duties of the mother towards her children, the ideal housewife, impact of mother on child, a woman's respect towards mother and mother-in-law, the procedures of cooking etc. The effort is to train women into becoming *sugruhini*—an ideal wife whose education only helps her to maintain a hygienic home and carefully cook food that would enhance the health of her husband and children. The connection between the well-being of the family and the well-being of the nation was continuously emphasized by reformers in Odisha. I have already referred to how the nationalist discourse created a home-world, material-spiritual dichotomy, placing women within the domain of the home/spiritual—a space that was uncorrupted by the outside world and the influence of the colonizer.

To cite from an author who wrote under the pseudonym of 'Sree Paribarika' (the family man) in the popular Odia journal *Utkal Sahitya* of the late 19th and early 20th century:

> Education is the most important way through which daughters can be brought up as good housewives. The main aim of women's education in our country should be to educate girls in such a way, which would enable

> to bring fortune, peace and happiness in the family. The kind of education the women of our country are given at present, aims at preparing them to be clerks and masters. This kind of education is not helpful in the development of motherhood of women. The kind of western education given to women does not help in educating them as good housewives or mothers. (cited in Biswal, 2009, 195)

It is significant that in the early years of the twentieth century, an Odia identity is pitted against the Bengali identity within the historical context of Odia nationalism. The figure of woman becomes the site for this contestation. The Odia woman is posed as a counter to the Bengali woman who is westernized, and she is the upholder of traditions and moral values (Biswal, 2009). Odia women are traditionally identified with the ideal of Lakshmi unlike the identification of Bengali women with Durga or Kali, the more assertive, powerful and destructive goddesses worshipped in Bengali culture. Lakshmi, on the other hand, is considered to be the symbol of domestic virtues. The goddess Lakshmi is devoutly worshipped by middle class upper caste Odia women right from the 19th century. As several Odia writers of the early twentieth century point out, an Odia woman, as the Lakshmi of the domestic space, must serve without expectation and be the embodiment of modesty and sacrifice. The *Lakshmi Purana* remains a conduct book for upper caste women to this day. Keeping together a joint family was considered a noble duty of all women. It was lamented that the greed of women caused the breakup of joint families.

Significantly, such idealization of the Odia woman also sets her up not just against the Bengali woman but also against the lower caste/class woman. The women from lower castes who had to work outside the confines of the domestic for a living (for example, women who sold oil, puffed rice etc or the fisher women) were the Other of the *bhadra* Odia woman.[4] To quote Biswal (2009, 200):

> The middle class educated Odia women also came to be defined against the "other" illiterate, lower caste and lower class women. The life situations of middle class educated women were depicted as the "situation of women" in Orissa. Though few writings recognized the existence of lower caste and lower class women, an "otherness" got attached to their life by describing it as low, hence to be rejected.

We can thus see that the concept of the ideal woman, entrenched in the popular imagination in Odisha, has been the product of socialization and historical reasons going back to the nationalist discourse of the 19th century. Upper caste Odia women read/recite religious/conduct books that spell out the *neeti* (conduct) of a woman, preparing her for the role of *Gruhalakshmi*. Such texts focus on the desirable conduct of the ideal woman before and after marriage. Books like '*Gruhalakshmi*', which was written by Jagabandhu Singh in mid 1900s, pronounced that women's schooling carried the negative impact of western society, and that higher education led to the deterioration of the moral values of women, and distracted them from the traditional household work, which was a crucial responsibility for an Odia woman. Sachidananda Mohanty (2004, 334) writes:

> The 1946 issue of Gruha Laxmi, by the famous Jagabandhu Singh, had gone through an impressive five imprints. In contrast, Sarala Devi's 'Nari-

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[4] For an extended discussion see Biswal (2009).

> ra Dabi'('The Rights of Women'), Hindustan Granthamala, Cuttack, 1934, a pioneering text, had a single imprint. The iconography of the cover picture of Gruha Laxmi provides an eloquent commentary on the agenda of the author. The cover shows the picture of a benevolent Laxmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity. Sareeclad, she is shown wearing a crown, emerging from the placid waters.

I have delineated a brief history of the concept of 'ideal Odia womanhood' as it has developed and become an entrenched phenomenon in the upper caste imagination in Odisha since the 19th century because it has exercised a great influence on the way women characters are portrayed in Odia cinema. The analysis of the films in the subsequent chapters will point to this. We will also see that very often the female protagonist is named after a chaste goddess, Sati, Lakshmi etc.

Gendered Socialization and the Female Protagonist

The folklore tradition that is part of gendered socialization in every middle class home helps us in getting a clear idea about the class, caste and gender of Odia society. Pati (1997) has listed several examples that are illustrative. The story of Siri Chandaluni (also known as Sriya) is about an outcaste woman who is a great devotee of goddess Lakshmi, but being a lower caste woman she does not have the right to enter into the temple. Hence, Lakshmi herself comes to her devotee's house. Obeying the command of his elder brother Balabhadra, Jagannatha asks Lakshmi to leave the temple for having entered an untouchable woman's home. However, upon Lakshmi's leaving the temple, there is scarcity of food, wealth and prosperity. Another story is about a prostitute name Karma Bai, a great devotee of Jagannath. One day while she cooks food for Jagannath, a Brahmin finds her brushing her teeth simultaneouly with a twig used for the cooking. He chides her, but Karma Bai retorts that Lord Jagannatha is above the concept of pure and impure. Yet another story is about Dasia Bauri which again addresses the relation between the upper and lower castes. Being of lower caste, and without the right to enter the temple, Dasia requests a group of Brahmins who were on their way to Puri, to offer fruits on his behalf to lord Jagannatha. The Brahmins accept his request and are surprised to find that the bunch of bananas offered by Dasia and placed before the deity had disappeared, indicating that the god had accepted only his offerings. As Pati (1997) has argued, these folk stories tell us that the lower castes have a place in the society but only in terms of their deep abjection, acceptance of their social position and reverence towards the upper castes. They are constantly placed on the margins. Women like Siri Chandaluni and Karma Bai are the Other of the goddess Lakshmi, and the latter's benevolence towards Siri only enhances her purity and moral authority in a patriarchal household. Pati (1997, 1393) has stated:

> It needs to be emphasised that such stories serve to rationalise the logic that excommunicates the outcastes from the temple. When Laxmi can shift into the house of a Chandaluni (viz, an outcaste woman) and Dasia can actually make Jagannatha accept offerings, what is the need for temple-entry?'[5]

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[5] Pati (1997, 1392) has pointed out that the Mahima cult in the 19th century had challenged the superiority of brahmins and caste-based hierarchies but that remains a suppressed history.

However, Satya P. Mohanty (2008a) has an interesting alternative reading of the Laksmi mythology as a counter hegemonic text. Through a reading of the sixteenth century Sudra poet Balaram Das's *Laksmi Purana*, he (2008a, 5) writes:

> Das attempts to articulate a subaltern consciousness of the oppressed and their common identity. His explicitly feminist narrative centers on the actions of a strong goddess who challenges male Brahminical authority and advocates both feminism and caste equality.

In Balaram Das's work, Mohanty (2008a, 5) states that 'the goddess Laksmi has an egalitarian vision and a new conception of the value of the individual based on action, duty, and work – especially traditionally devalued work'. Clearly this reading of the goddess becomes manifest in the case of Siri Chandaluni or Sriya when the goddess defies her husband and his brother.

> The middle section of the narration may be called "The lesson that the Goddess teaches the mightiest Gods," as she makes sure—conspiring with her fellow goddess Saraswati and Nidravati, together with a few minor gods of the natural world, and the spirits of the underworld—that the two brothers learn what it means to be poor, hungry, and socially despised. (Mohanty 2008a, 7)

Mohanty (2008a, 8) suggests that women and outcastes come together in Das's text 'to question unjustified authority…the critique is directed primarily at their [the gods'] arbitrary and hypocritical use of patriarchal power'.

However, I would argue that the radical meanings of the *Laksmi Purana* by Balaram Das are diluted in upper caste Odia cultural re-articulations, especially in cinema, even though this book is a staple of all such households. Laksmi emerges as more domesticated, as '*gruhalaksmi*', a concept that I have referred to before. Mainstream Odia films, are again and again centered around a female figure who is like Laksmi in terms of her modesty, grace or sacrifice for the sake of the patriarchal family. It is only in the 60s that one encounters heroines with potentially subversive potential such as Sati of *Malajanha*. Sati commits suicide in the end but the fact still remains that she feels ardent desire for a man who is not her husband. Perhaps, that is why she, is meaningfully named Sati (and not Lakshmi), who was Shiva's consort and brought upon destruction and self-immolation after she and her husband were humiliated by her father. In the film *Malajanha*, Sati's 'self-destruction' serves to resolve the moral dilemma she is faced with but also prevents the societal upheaval and turmoil her 'illegitimate' desire would have entailed.

The films of Odisha generally recirculate and reproduce the mythologies already in circulation in dominant popular culture such as the folk tales (such as the ones about Lakshmi and her benevolence) that are part of middle class households and religious practices that revere Jagannatha and Lakshmi. The pioneers of Odia film Industry were from middle class sections of the society. Understandably, their perspectives and narratives, even when progressive and reformist, are deeply influenced by their caste/class backgrounds.

Odia Cinema: the 60s and After

Sita Bibaha (1936) was followed *Lalita*, released in 1949 after a gap of more than a decade. *Lalita* was the first Odia film to be released after independence. It was produced by Shourendra Pratap Singh Deo and directed by Kalyan Gupta of West Bengal. Very few films were produced during this early stage. *Lalita*, once again, is steeped in the mythologies of Jagannatha and is about how a Brahmin named Bidyapati, on behalf of the king of Puri, sets out to retrieve the idol of Jagannath, which is in possession of the king of the *Savara* tribe, Biswabasu. This film literally plays out the

appropriation of the tribal god by more upper caste tradition. In 1960, *Sri Lokanath* became the first Odia cinema to get the national award. Between 1960s and 1970s, 34 Odia films were made. Films like *Sri Lokanath* (1960), *Nuabou* (1962), *Surjyamukhi* (1963), *Jibana Sathi* (1963), *Amada Baata* (1964), *Malajanha* (1965), *Abhinetri* (1965), *Kaa* (1966), *Bhai Bhauja* (1967), *Matira Manisha* (1966), *Kie Kahara* (1968), *Arundhati* (1967), *Stree* (1968), *Adina Megha* (1969) were received warmly by the audience. However, film makers were dependent upon technology and studios of Calcutta. For all the necessary technology and other connected aspects of cinema, such as, studio, camera, directors, technicians, and promotion, Odisha was dependent on studios in the big cities like Calcutta, Mumbai, Chennai etc. These were the obstacles in the development of Odia cinema. The then chief minister Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab had convened a meeting of people from the Odia film fraternity on 5th December 1960 at the state secretariat where it was decided to set up a studio at Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar. Following this the foundation of the studio was finally laid by the Chief Minister on 26 January 1961.

The project remained stagnant due to the apathy of government officials and political instability. However it marked the beginning of state patronage of Odia cinema.[6]

1975 is marked as the beginning of the golden era for Odia cinema. Within the few years that followed, almost 111 films were made in Odisha. The first color Oriya cinema *Gapa Helebi Sata* (‘A Story, Yet True’) was made in 1976 and met with great success. In 1976, the second Odia color film *Shesha Shrabana* (‘The Last Monsoon’) got the national award. Impressed by the film, Tarachand Badjatya, the thespian of Rajashree Films in Bombay, requested the director of the film Prashant Nanda to remake the film in Hindi. The film was remade in Hindi as *Nayya*, but it did not succeed. In 1976 Odisha Film Development Corporation was established for the development of Odia cinema. In 1980, Kalinga studio was established at Ghatikia, Bhubaneswar. The Corporation helped financially towards the building of more theaters in villages and also financed the film producers. Until 1979, there were only 118 theatres throughout Odisha, and the business figure of Odia cinema was within 15 to 30 lakhs. With the financial help of the Corporation, the People’s Cinema Scheme was activated in villages, and 139 new theatres were built.[7]

Odia cinema reflects the complex relationships of class, caste and gender in Odia society. If we just think of the names of Odia films of 60s and 70s, we find that most of them are named after the female lead, often referring to their familial positions as mother or daughter or daughter-in-law. Some examples are: *Aamari gaan Jhua* ('A Girl from Our Village', 1953), *Gouri* (1956), *Maa* (1959), *Nua Bou* ('New Sister-in-law',1962), *Abhinetri* ('Actress', 1965), *Arundhati* (1967), *Gruhalaxmi* (1967), *Stree* 1968), *Badhu Nirupama* (1987), *Bada Bhauja* (1988), *Bohu hebe Emiti* (1988) and several more. However the focus remains on the idealized notion of womanhood rather than on the rights or voices of the women. In Odia cinema, the domains of production and direction have been almost entirely male dominated. However, as we shall see in the subsequent chapter, certain directors and Nitai Palit or Mrinal Sen, attempted to bring in a woman's point of view. As most of the films are based on normative Odia family values, women are represented as submissive and docile, willing to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of family. In subsequent chapters, especially chapter II and chapter III, I will bring out in more detail the continuities between the figure of the woman and the consolidation of the family space, especially in the sixties and the seventies.

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[6] As Shyamhari Chakra (2013, 67) has pointed out, in 1978, the state government enforced a rule for the compulsory screening of Odia films for at least four weeks in cinema halls in Odisha. This was achieved through the sustained state-wide campaign undertaken by two sociocultural organizations, Nilachakra and Nilasaila, since 1970. The Odisha Film Development Corporation (OFDC) was established in 1976 at Cuttack and Kalinga Studios Private Limited opened in the capital city of Bhubaneswar in 1980. The availability of infrastructure and funding helped the Odia film industry to grow.

[7] See Singh (2008) and Chakra (2013).

Section II

Research Hypothesis

This study tracks certain critical themes and questions that recur in Odia cinema with a focus on gender since the sixties onwards into the 90s and after. I focus on popular, mainstream films. Even though I look at recurrence and similarities, I also explore significant shifts in the way women, family or relationships are projected at different moments since the sixties. I try to link these shifts to social and cultural contexts of Odisha.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objectives of the study are:

- To analyze certain key shifts and re-imaginations of gender relations in Odia cinema from the 60s to the 2000s
- To explore the connections between the normative ideal of Odia womanhood and the representation of Odia identity and family in cinema
- To probe Odia cinema that as an active site of cultural dominance and negotiations over Odia identity despite its neglected status in the history of Indian cinema

Methodology

As the study of gender is interdisciplinary in nature, this study draws from feminist discourse as well as several other disciplines/approaches like Sociology, Film and Media studies, textual analysis, Political theory and Cultural studies. Primary and secondary sources of data will be used for the study. Primary sources constitute film texts and interviews of well-known personalities and directors related to Odia cinema. I also conducted a small pilot study among young, college going students to understand more recent trends in Odia films. Secondary sources include newspapers, journals, websites and theoretical and analytical texts.

Unlike Hindi or Telugu films, hardly any academic work is done on Odia cinema. So, getting existing critical material to support the study has been a big challenge. I was also not able to take interviews of some of the actors and directors due to the time constraint as they were very busy with their shooting schedules. In the primary stage of the research, due to the unavailability of the film texts, it took a long time to get access to some of the old films. Many of the old films are preserved as part of individual collections which is almost impossible to access for the public. Very few books and articles written on the Odia cinema. However, journalists Surjya Deo and Shyam Hari have compiled interesting and informative histories of Odia cinema. The Film Journalist Forum (FJF) has in recent years taken active initiative to restore the old films. The Forum arranges the screening of old Odia films since the last few years under an initiative named ‘Smruti Chhaya’ and invites people associated with films of an older era to share their memories. Over the years it has gained popularity and also has arranged poster exhibitions of old films. I often hung out with the people associated with the above initiative and gained some insights. To get access to the old films, I visited Pune’s National Film Archive of India, where I got the opportunity to watch a few films from the 60s, but was not allowed to copy them.

I interviewed several film personalities, such as, the noted actress Jharana Das (first introduced as an actress in the award-winning *Malajanha* (1960)), veteran actor Sarat Pujari and film journalist Ashok Palit. I feel my research would have gained immensely if I could interview Manimala who came into cinema in the 60s, from the popular theatre background. However, she was very ill by this time and subsequently passed away in 2016. While a popular actress known for her histrionics, she came from a non-middle class, performing background unlike the middle class, educated Jharana Das. I believe speaking to her would have yielded a different set of insights. However, I gained some perspective through my conversation with Jharana Das who was Manimala's contemporary and acted in several films with her.

Rationale of the Study

I decided to work on Odia cinema in order in order to contribute to scholarship on a marginalized and much neglected regional cinema. As we know the emphasis has always been on Bombay/Bollywood and increasingly on South Indian cinema. Odia cinema industry is known as Ollywood since 80s which is based on Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. This is clearly a derivation from the more popular and nationally recognized Bollywood and thus Odia film industry is defined in relation to Bollywood. I believe Odia cinema throws light on cinema as an important site of cultural politics in Odisha. Several of the themes discussed above—the construction of ideal Odia womanhood and its importance in maintaining the moral hegemony of upper caste middle class Odia family/society—are reflected in Odia cinema. I hope this study will contribute towards uncovering a gendered history of Odia cinema.

Chapter Plan

This dissertation consists of six chapters. The introductory chapter includes a brief overview of the the study, the background and contexts in which it is located, the research questions, objectives of the study and methodology drawn upon. This is followed by the second chapter which is a review of the literature that I have drawn on to carry out my research for this dissertation.

Chapter 3 engages with the films of the 60s and how the gender question often emerges in a reformist narrative in this post independence context. The normative ideal of the Odia woman is questioned but this questioning is located in the psychological realm—shown as a conflict within the woman's mind. Gender relations are embedded in the tensions between rural and urban, tradition and modern. The presence of progressive directors such as Mrinal Sen and Nitai Palit and actors such as Prashanta Nanda, Sarat Pujari and Jharana Das influence the cinema of this period.

Chapter 4 shows cinema attempting to address the contestation of the State and traditional power relations from the marginalized sections of the society in the 70s at the national level and in Odisha. As the 'angry young man' emerges in Hindi cinema, a parallel phenomenon happens in Odia cinema. Such roles are played by the tall, brooding, handsome hero Sriram Panda. But as we shall see, despite the subaltern protests in Odisha, the rebellious hero of the films is always an upper caste middle class person who leads the 'masses'. Films such as *Jajabara* are examples. We also find that the class-caste relations remain fundamentally unchallenged. The function of the woman is to regulate/moderate the tensions between classes/castes through her admiration or love for the hero and through her sacrifice. We find that there is an effort to re-consolidate and reaffirm the Odia middle class family in the face of growing unrest and challenge to the traditional hierarchies in the society.

Chapter 5 explores how the cinema of the 80s and the 90s engages with the issues of dowry, sexual violence and discrimination that are foregrounded by the women's movement. The domestic space emerges often as a site of violence against women. Against the backdrop of feminist resistance, popular Odia cinema finds it necessary to reinvent and legitimize the ideal of domesticity which is normative in Odia society. It is interesting to see how the film narratives re-articulate the feminist questions and re-locate them in the discourse of ideal Odia womanhood. A woman's resistance and rebellion is legitimated only by her moral superiority and devotion to the family. While she may take revenge against a particular man who killed her husband, she cannot question the family relations itself.

Chapter 6 briefly discusses the more recent trend of remakes that becomes popular in the 2000s. Several eminent personalities from Odia cinema, especially those from an older era and noted film critics/journalists have looked at this trend as a loss of creativity and the authentic Odia identity that was represented in earlier Odia cinema. However, I make an initial and tentative attempt to understand this as a sociological phenomenon that needs to be placed in the context of the changing gender relations and the new professional aspirations of the middle class. This chapter is also a summing up of and conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter II

A Review of Literature: Frames and Approaches

This chapter is a review of the literature in the broad areas of gender, cinema, gender, culture and more specifically of the limited work on Odia cinema. In this thesis, I look at the film as continuously participating in the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the state. Hence, I have tried to map the social and cultural contexts of Odisha through some of the available readings by cultural theorists and political scientists. In doing this, my focus is on gender i.e. to explore how normative ideas of gender are influenced by dominant cultural ethos and vice versa. Some of my readings have helped me to grapple with the concept of 'ideal womanhood' which is a dominant trope in Odia cinema, and to which the legitimacy of the middle class is tied.

I begin with a few readings that have helped to me to think about cinema as not simply an isolated medium or mode of entertainment but as actively engaged in the debates and contests in the public sphere and popular domain.

Cinema is a powerful public medium of representation. Even as it entertains, it sends out strong messages. Socio-cultural factors, specific to each society come to be represented in its cinema. According to James Monaco (2000, 262), the politics of film and the politics of 'real life' are so closely intertwined that it is generally impossible to determine which is the cause and which is the effect. Monaco also focuses on the political nature of the film. He argues that the political nature of the film is exhibited at three levels. Ontologically, because the medium of film itself tends to deconstruct the traditional values of the culture; mimetically, because any film either reflects reality or re-creates it (and its politics); inherently, because the intense communicative nature of film gives the relationship between film and observer a national political dimension (Monaco 2000, 263).

Ashish Rajadhyaksha's (1993) essay on 'The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology' gives an overall idea about the need to set up an Indian film industry and its importance in the time of *swadeshi* movement as a vehicle of nationalism. Phalke wanted to prove to the world that Indians could make films even if they often had to contend with primitive conditions of filmmaking. In Phalke's hands, film was not only about the moving image on screen, it emerged as a nationalist medium. Rajadhyaksha (1993, 66) argues that as the moving image was produced through a new chain of production, distribution and exhibition relations, its mobility aspired to the several resonances that had already mediated the image into its cultural and political meanings. In Odisha, the first commercial film *Sita Bibaha* was produced in 1936 under the pioneering leadership of Mohan Sunder Dev Goswami. I feel that Rajadhyakshya's interpretation of Phalke's urge to make a film about Indian gods and mythologies holds true about Goswami as well. Against all odds, he made a film in Odia language, steeped in Odia cultural and performance traditions. As we have seen in the previous chapter, he was driven by the need to represent an 'Odia identity'.

Well known film journalist Surya Deo is someone who has tirelessly worked for the preservation, digital restoration and public screening of Odia films of yesteryears. Drawing from his years as a journalist and a film enthusiast, he has written a book called *Odia Cinema: Rupa Ruparupantara* ('Changing Shades of Odia Cinema', 2016). The book deals with 75 years of Odia cinema since its beginning with the release of *Sita Bibaha* in 1936. In the chapter 'Sahityara Kaya, Cinemara Maya' ('The Shape of Literature, the Magic of the Cinema'), the author demonstrates his admiration for the films of the 60s and 70s that drew from classic Odia novels, thus establishing a critical link between literature and cinema. He is contemptuous of the remake trend of the more recent times which he feels is degeneration of Odia cinema and nothing but shameless copy of hits from Bollywood and southern languages.

Bhim Singh (2008) has discussed the early Odia film industry in minute detail in *Odia Chalachitrara Agyanta Adyaya*. He has given a detailed history of *Sita Bibaha*, the first Odia film followed by some other early Odia films. The shooting location, salaries of the artists, star casts, agreement between the producer and artists have been elaborately discussed. The book also gives an idea about the involvement of Odia cinema in small scale industry and the formation of other important organizations related to film industry.

Certain texts relating to gender and nation have helped me to analyze the politics of gendered representation and the configuration of family in Odia cinema.

In the process of nation-building, the role of women emerges as an important question. The predicament in cultural texts such as cinema also is to balance 'core' traditional values and yet 'reform' women as appropriate for a modern Indian identity. Sumanta Banerjee (1989) has discussed the existence of street performances in the nineteenth century Bengal in which women from the lower economic groups and castes participated. Their songs, dances, literature, performances narrate the sufferings, desires and lives of the women from diverse classes, often in ‘bawdy’ and popular idioms. However, in the late nineteenth century, the reformist ideology of the Bengali middle class created a new breed of women in *bhadralok* homes. These women, as the reformers wrote extensively in their writings, were to cultivate patterns of appropriate behaviour, isolated from the impact and traces of lower caste women’s popular culture. The close proximity among the women from different socio-economic background was found threatening by the educated men, and this guided their concept of emancipation. The performing lower caste women would increasingly find less and less access to middle class elite homes. Banerjee (1989, 131) also points out, ‘while initiating social reforms such as women’s education, widow remarriage, ban on child marriage and on *kulin* Brahmin polygamy, which were primarily aimed at bringing about changes in Bengali *sambhranto* homes where the women in many respects enjoyed less freedom than women of the `lower orders’, the male *bhadralok* undoubtedly paved the way for the `emancipation’ of their womenfolk—an emancipation which meant greater participation for women in the new social milieu and cultural affairs of educated society’.

Somnath Zutshi (1993, 84-85) points out that since the beginning of nineteenth century, the `woman question’ has haunted nationalist thought. Though the debates touched upon every aspect of a woman’s being, the hidden agenda was always that of control. Resolving the `woman question’ in this sense meant that control of the nation (the body politics) was linked to control of the woman (the female body).

Representation of women in cinema is a major aspect in my thesis. The following books have helped me to address this question.

Bindu Nair (2002, 55) analyses that most of the stories played on the screen belong to men and women appear only in relation to them. She talks about the male gaze as most of the films are made by men for a predominantly male audience and reflects on the relationship between the way men look at women and the resulting power dynamics in society. She also discusses the male spectatorship, which seeks to control and indirectly possess the female figure through narcissistic identification with the main male protagonist, who controls the gaze and the events on the screen, thus giving the male spectator a reassuring sense of omnipotence (Nair 2002, 56).

According to Gita Viswanath (2002, 43), ‘The women are shown in subordinate roles, upholding traditional values. They represent the community and are seen as repositories of community values. Women authenticate a national/ cultural identity. The body of the woman is the carrier of cultural signs. Symbols of marriage like mangalsutra, sindoor etc. are fetishized. The traditional/modern dichotomy with reference to the women’s question is located within another dichotomy of body/soul, outer/inner.’

Laura Mulvey (1989, 58) in her much cited essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ has posited that the film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle. Psychoanalytic theory is a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the film form. The female protagonist is subjected to the scopophilic gaze of the camera, the male protagonist and the male spectator which turns her into an object. However, she cannot return the gaze; she can only be on display.

Family/familial values in Odia cinema being a core concern in my thesis, I draw on following works. The family emerged as the spiritual core of national culture during the 19th century (Chatterjee, 1989). The colonizer represented Indian society as regressive based on the subordinate position of women in the family. As a response, the nationalists re-fashioned family as the site of a new kind of domesticity. A new patriarchy would come into play where the women would be modern, educated but their dress, demeanor and bodies would be coded as upper caste; the women would emerge as the preservers of the national tradition. While the outer world is for the men who must compete with the western society in spheres of science and technology, the women represented the sanctity of the inner world. The influence of the colonial state would be kept outside of the inner domain of national culture. It is interesting to study the role of cinema as a popular cultural medium and the manner in which it re-articulates the hegemonic cultural paradigm of the home and the world in the post-independence context.

It is significant that family plays a major role in most of the films after independence. The struggle between tradition and modern, the clashes between the older and younger generations, man-woman relationships and specifically the role of women in the changing social settings emerge as major themes.

Madhava Prasad (1998, 91) also proposes that women are regarded as the guardians of national culture; it is women’s appearance that becomes the mark of distinction. Thus, while colonialism leads to changes in men’s clothing (with the European shirt and trousers becoming standard at least in cities), what women should wear became a subject of national debate. Prasad puts forth an important category titled ‘feudal family romance’. According to Prasad (1998, 67), ‘the basic narrative structure, where the unity and jouissance of the feudal family, its control over its accumulated wealth, is threatened by usurpers and modern values, is repeated in numerous films of the post independence period. Even though the action unfolds against an international setting, the essential features of the feudal family structure remain firmly in place. From the organic space of the north Indian village to the high-tech tourist spots of the world, the feudal structure displays a mobility that demonstrates how powerful its ideological hold was and to an extent still is.

Jyotika Virdi (2003) analyses the nation represented as a family in cinema—as a family which has diversities. She points out that Hindi film industry as a dominant cultural institution is accessed by all groups of people irrespective of class and caste. Virdi tries to demonstrate how Hindi cinema emerges as national cinema and how it deploys post-colonial nationalism. The idealized woman is westernized but still is traditional enough to keep the family values intact. The idea of nationalism shifts between spiritual and material spheres. In post-colonial cinema one repeatedly witnesses that while men carry the burden of the material sphere, women are restricted to the spiritual sphere. According to Virdi (2003, 71), 'To use woman to represent the entire nation blurs the boundaries contested by different communities'.

Valentina Vitali (2000) also argues that in the post colonial period, the Indian family in cinema becomes the mediator of modernization and nationalism. It symbolizes tradition even when there is modernization. It was important that the purity of the female leads was projected on screen. Those actresses (for example, Meena Kumaari, Nargis etc) who were of mixed lineage, with a feudal or middle class father and a courtestan mother, needed to be rehabilitated/reformed through the images they projected on screen. For instance, in Pakeezah (1971), Meena Kumar born out of the liason between an aristocratic father and a courtesan mother had to establish that she had a ‘pure heart’ (pakeezah). She was redeemed by her love for the hero, her endurance and her sacrifice.

Ravi S. Vasudevan (1996, 83) has discussed Mehboob Khan’s *Andaaz* (1949) to understand the relationship between filmic representation and the social and political contexts and dilemmas. In this film, the Bombay cinema, with its aspirations to the ‘national’, all-India audience, narrated a story about a woman’s destiny in a way which had interesting implications for questions of nationhood and modernity. While she begins as an outgoing, free spirited, desiring woman, at the end she must suffer for the ‘transgression’ of the boundaries of femininity. But it is the woman herself who accepts her suffering as a consequence of her own actions and as essential for her own reform. The film turns social oppression into the self-recognition on part of the woman.

Several authors have historicized the normative societal values of Odisha and how these have evolved. These critiques have helped me to understand the normative notions of gender in Odia cinema and the pervasive notion of ideal Odia womanhood.

Discussing the political conditions of Odisha in post-colonial period, Manoranjan Mohanty (1990, 340) has written that ‘politics in post-independence Orissa continued to be dominated by the brahman-karan middle class’. According to Mohanty (1990) the Dalits and the poor continued to be marginalized in education, land ownership and control of bureaucracy or politics. Mohanty has pointed out how land reforms in Odisha had limited results and how pre-capitalist relations continued to control agriculture. This critique has helped me to engage with popular films like *Jajabara* (‘Nomad’, 1975) which represents the upper caste hero as the leader of the masses. Mohanty’s engagement with the Jagannath culture as essentially elitist has helped me to analyze the prevalence of Jagannath or his consort Lakshmi as popular, venerated icons in the cinema of the state.

Biswamoy Pati (1997) echoes similar sentiments regarding the Odia upper caste middle class. Referring to the folk tales associated with Jagannatha, as we have seen in the previous chapter, he brings out how lower caste women such Siri Chandaluni or Karma Bai or lower caste men such as Dasia Bauri are defined and celebrated only in terms of their respect for the order of the higher castes. As we shall see, this ideological trend animates Odia cinema where a poor woman is elevated because of her blind devotion to the patriarchal order (as in *Gapa Helebi Sata* (‘A Story yet True’, 1976) even when she is sexually exploited and then discarded by the man she loves. Similarly, in most films, lower caste women and men are either invisible or are tied to a lower social status by the way their bodies are marked.

Sachidananda Mohanty (2004) has elaborated how in early 20th century the goddess Lakshmi was conflated with the ideal wife in conduct books. Discussing the work titled *Gruha Laxmi*, by Jagabandhu Singh, published in three volumes during the late 1930 and early 1940s, he traces a genealogy of the concept of ideal Odia womanhood. The book remains popular in Odia households even today. It invokes the girl child to be like *Gruha Laxmi* and emulate figures like Sita, Damayanti, Laxmi or Saraswati. On the other hand, the male child must leave for school early in the morning and prepare to be a *pandit* (Mohanti 2004, 335). Mohanty (2004, 335) further points out:

> While the Conduct books continued their mission, Oriya literary women around the same time were voicing an alternative rhetoric of female empowerment'. For instance, the celebrated Utkal Sahitya regularly carried a column by Suprabha Devi called Nari Prasanga….[She] along with her sister Narmada Kar consistently fought for female education and empowerment.

Satya P. Mohanty (2008) offers an alternative reading of *Lakshmi Purana*, a household religious text narrating the life and greatness of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess. He (2008, 5) writes:

> Balaram Das's *Lakshmi Purana*, however, is a counterhegemonic text….Das attempts to articulate a subaltern consciousness of the oppressed and their common identity. His explicitly feminist narrative centers on the actions of a strong goddess who challenges male Brahminical authority and advocates both feminism and caste equality.

Madhumita Biswal (2009) has discussed how the the notion of '*gruhalakshmi*' became the ideal model of womanhood in the late 19th and early 20th century Odisha. Motherhood was represented as the most important duty of a woman. While she could be educated, her education needed to be pressed into the task of creating a clean, hygienic home and rearing healthy children. Biswal (2009) has also extensively discussed how the 'Odia woman' was defined in terms of her difference from the 'brazen', westernized Bengali woman on the one hand and the 'unrefined' toiling lower caste women on the other.

My reading of these texts historicizing the critical position of Lakshmi/Jagannath or the formation of normative gender ideals in late 19th century and 20th century Odia poetry, literature and culture helps me to situate the narratives, conflicts and resolutions in popular films. Often, contestations around class, caste or religion are controlled through the consolidation of the female sacrificing self.

In the next chapter, I look at the Odia cinema of the 60s and the way the woman becomes the site for the contestation between tradition and modernity, the urban and rural, authentic Odia culture and corrupt outside influences. These films address a range of issues such as a woman’s desire, social evils and modernity.

Chapter III

Re-forming 'Woman': the 1960s

The aspirations of modernity and nation building, inspired by the Nehruvian ethos, formed the cornerstone of post-independence India. The stress on development, technology and progress introduced a shift in existing social relations and economy. The transition was not only economy- oriented, but was also reflected in social, cultural and political domains. Culture became the site where contestations over 'what is modern' took place. Notably the modern needed to be combined with 'nationalist values'. As Geeta Kapur (2000, 202) says especially in relation to the work of the modernist film maker Satyajit Ray, 'culture was sought to be institutionalized precisely in order to carry out the overall mandate of modernization. In fact this institutionalizing process was conceived of as a way of disentangling the modern from the nationalist polemic. The latter had often to speak the name of tradition even if it covertly strengthened the desire for the modern'. This is a complex process where tradition has to be legitimated by modernity and vice versa. If one watches early post independence cinema in India, one can perceive a continuous balancing between the modern and the traditional. For instance, in Mehboob Khan's celebrated *Mother India* (1957), the chastity, suffering and sacrifice of the woman protagonist ultimately becomes the harbinger of development to her village in the shape of the dam. One can clearly see how the image of traditional motherhood is tied to the project of development and modernity.

As Partha Chatterjee (1989) has pointed out in his landmark essay 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', the emergent nationalist middle class in the late nineteenth century did not envision a radical change of the social relations and values. The family/woman became representative of the private and the spiritual that must remain uncorrupted by outside influence.

As I had discussed in the previous chapter, at the beginning of the 20th century, a lot of labour was invested in carving out an Odia ideal womanhood. The Odia woman needed to be differentiated from her Bengali counterpart on the one hand and from the lower caste woman on the other. She was to be the embodiment of sacrifice, spirituality and domesticity. In this chapter, I propose that this hegemonic upper caste ideal continues to form the centre of gendered relationships in Odia cinema in the 60s. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section maps certain critical social and cultural conditions of the Odia cinema of the 60s. The second section deals with the analysis of specific films that reflect these contexts.

Section I

Social contexts of 1960s

In the post-colonial modernizing State, one that laid heavy emphasis on industrialization and socio-economic development, the film industry in its early stage did not receive much governmental support. Barring the films of a few directors like Satyajit Ray and a few others inspired by his realist- modernist tradition, cinema was looked upon with a certain suspicion. As a mass form, it was seen as participating in popular beliefs and superstitions, and excessively melodramatic. Its popular appeal was looked upon with suspicion; as having the potential to mislead and corrupt people and thus disrupt the project of modernity.

As Prasad (1998, 32) points out, in the run-up to independence, a section of the industry expected that the government of free India would recognize the potential that cinema held as a medium and would give it the same encouragement as given to other industries. It was felt that a modernizing nation would need a modern cultural institution to undertake the requisite ideological tasks. Nehruvian government, on the other hand, was not supportive and did not prioritize the role of film industry.

Against this backdrop, the films of the 60s came with some specific messages. They often reflect the struggles to demarcate an Indian modernity—what can come in and what is unacceptable. The Hindi film *Khandaan* (1965) is exemplary of this endeavour. As Prasad (1998, 65) analyses the narrative centres round the threat posed to the unity of a feudal landowning family by the intrusion of alien values, embodied in the figures of the villain and his sister played by Pran and Mumtaz, the Singapore-returned relatives of the landlord's selfish wife. Here 'western' modernity is viewed as bad modernity, a threat to Indian traditional values.

Significantly, the idea of modernity is very often tied to the 'status' of the woman—in terms regulating her freedom and desire. In a modern nation, a woman cannot simply be ascribed a subordinated status as in a feudal structure, yet her desire cannot be allowed to transgress the 'core' Indian cultural norms. How do films of post-independence India address this dilemma?

Hindi films, popular at a national level, such as *Sangam* (1964), *Dil ek Mandir* (1963) raised many questions related to the woman's desire and demonstrated how the public sphere of masculine bonding and national values take precedence over the private question of ‘desire’. As I hope to bring out in this chapter, in the context of Odia films, questions connected to the woman’s desire are repeatedly raised. In a film like *Malajanha* (1965) where a woman’s desire is addressed, it figures overtly as a critique of early marriage of girls, but it even goes further to depict the attraction developing between two young people. It shows Sati’s repulsion at the sight of her much older husband. She does not allow him to consummate the marriage. But ultimately her love for a man outside marriage can be legitimated only through her death. Thus, her spirit and will as a woman are contained by her ‘choice’ to die.

Regulating the ‘Modern’

Hindi and Bengali cinemas have a major influence on Oriya cinema of the period even as it is simultaneously shaped by the specific contexts and conditions of Odisha. The impact of Hindi cinema stems from its pan-Indian format and reach in Odisha. Where Bengali cinema is concerned, at a very concrete level, many of the films made in the sixties are produced by Bengali directors. The proximity and close relationship between Bengali and Odia cultures in this early stage is noteworthy.

As Prasad (1998) has analysed the post- independence Hindi cinema mirrors the coalitional nature of the Indian state. This is reflected both in the narrative and in the mode of production. The three partners within this coalition are the landed elite, the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. The feudal ideology is never completely abandoned; it survives alongside the new capitalist-modernist ethic. It is interesting to note how feudal elements are combined with the modern in post colonial cinema, reflected in plot, characterization and in gender relations. The conflicts of cultural modernity are played out in several films of the time. The films of this period portray the conflict between the pre-capitalist ideology and modern values. Madhava Prasad (1998, 67) has argued that the basic narrative structure where the unity of the feudal family, its control over its accumulated wealth, is threatened by usurpers with western values, is repeated in numerous films of this period. Films like *Love in Tokyo* (1966), *An evening in Paris* (1967) demonstrate this trend. The resolutions are interesting; while these films have songs and scenes shot in foreign locales, no radical threat to the fundamental structure of the patriarchal feudal family is presented and the ending must legitimate the authority of this structure. As Prasad (1998, 67) observes:

> This structure could incorporate consumerism and other 'modern' features without damage as long as it did not slide into a position of affirmation of new sexual and social relations based on individualism.

As feudal structures and modern ideology combine in interesting and practical ways, a new middle class is constituted. Prasad (1998, 163) observes the following—important in the Odia cinema context of the 60s:

> The middle class, however, also carries the burden of national identity on its shoulders. While one sector of the middle-class cinema represents a community hemmed in by the larger society and devoted to its own reproduction, there is another that presents the class's national profile, its reformist role in the drama of class and religious conflicts within the nation state.

The films of the 60s reflect the strong progressive modernist ethos which is officially adopted by the state. The protagonists of these films, out of their sheer individuality and strength of character are shown to struggle against rigid social structures. Strong women characters emerge in films like *Bandini* (1963)*, Sujata* (1960). Parama Roy (1998, 139) argues that bourgeois Indian nationalism in the twentieth century created a new subject position for women—women as nationalists, activists and public figures. Women's active participation in the freedom struggle created the ground for this. Films like *Anuradha (*1960), *Love in Simla (*1960)*, Barsaat ki Raat (*1*960), Jis Desh mein Ganga Behti Hai (*1960*)* dealt with the changing socio-economic context of the country and the shifts in women's position.

As we shall see, such consolidation of the middle class and its reformist role is central to the Odia films of the sixties as well. As an upper caste elite transitions into middle class, it also faces the challenge of modernizing. The woman then emerges as the site of both modernity and tradition.

While social reform and modernity are the key themes, they are intricately linked to the women's question in the new social context. Prasad (1998, 80-81) argues that most of the films of 60s and 70s focused on the question of women's position in a modernizing society. In several of these narratives we see an attempt to represent the woman's point of view or to build the narrative around a woman caught between desire and an oppressive tradition. My analysis of the Odia cinema of the sixties in subsequent sections will bear this point out.

Family: A Central Issue

Family played a crucial role in narrating the story of modern India. In the Odia cinema of the sixties the family repeatedly emerges as the site where the tensions between traditional forms of authority and the aspirations for modernity are played out.

In important ways, the family serves as the space where appropriate and acceptable forms of modernity are developed through conflicts between characters and resolutions. Family is a sphere which is traditional and yet can no longer be overtly repressive or feudal. It needs to be modernized and reformed in the changing context. On the one hand is the Nehruvian aspiration to modernize and on the other, are the continuing grasp of cultural ideologies bound to older formations of caste and community.

From Film to Novel

It is notable that several of the Odia novels of written in the 30s are turned into films in the sixties. What could be the possible reason? Is it because the novels of that period are very often influenced by Marxist-Gandhian ideologies and hence lend themselves to a cinema that is engaged in the project of modernity?

Kalindi Charan Panigrahi’s celebrated 1934 novel *Matira Manisha* (Man of the Soil) is turned into an equally acclaimed film of the same name in 1966. Panigrahi (1901-1991) was greatly influenced by the romanticism of Rabindranath Tagore as well as Gandhian ideology. He, along with his friends, Annada Shankar Ray and Baikuntha Patnaik, had founded the Sabuja Sahitya Samiti (Green Group) in 1920. As Lila Ray and Narendra Misra (1968, 108) point out, these writers cultivated a romantic outlook and an idealist’s approach to life. In fact, Gandhian idealism forms the core of Kalindi Charan’s writings.

He was also influenced by Marxist thoughts. He used the natural idiom of people with great efficiency and skill. Ray and Misra (1968) point out that the plot of *Matira Manisha* has a vast range, situating human relationships in the context of post war social conditions, agrarian culture, rural life and the joint family system. It explores the human values of sacrifice and moral uprightness as opposed to greed and harmful westernization and portrays the landscapes, traditions and idioms of Odia rural settings. As Jitendra Narayan Patnaik (2007) has stated, central to Kalindi Charan's novels is his engagement with social problems and moral values. In 1960s the classic Odia novels like *Malajanha*, *Matira Manisha*, *Kaa and Abhinetri* were turned into films. Judith Mayne (1988, 6) has argued that the traditional middle-class novel is influential in pervasive ways in contemporary film studies. The notion of classical film narrative, or of the classical realist film text, has evolved from the analogy between film and the novel.

Representing Social Reality

Though Odia cinema started in 1936 with *Sita Bibaha*, very few films were made in the early stage. Odia film industry picked up in terms of growth and range in the late fifties. In the 1960s three films got the prestigious national award. Films like *Amada Baata* (The Untrodden Road: 1964), *Malajanha* ('Dead Moon': 1965), *Adina Megha* ('The Unseasonal Cloud': 1969) etc. are the landmark films of that period.

The films of this period were often neo-realist in terms of their content and symbolism after the manner of Ritwik Ghatak and Bimal Roy. Conditions of everyday life, including poverty, oppression, injustice, and desperation were central themes. As I have pointed out, these films drew heavily from Odia novels written in the 30s and 40s, influenced by Gandhian and Socialist ideologies. They were not simply meant to entertain but addressed serious contemporary socio-economic issues, drawing on everyday life—poverty, injustice, social discrimination, oppression and so on. An early example of such trends in Hindi Cinema would be Bimal Roy's *Do Bigah Zamin* (1953) which is about the trials and tribulations of a poor farmer to save his small piece of land from a powerful landlord. Such films show oppressive social contexts but the poor remain moral and upright under most difficult circumstances. The woman is the moral compass of the story. As I analyze some specific Odia films later in this chapter, these aspects will hopefully emerge more clearly.

As Valentina Vitali (2000) has discussed, during the late colonial and post-colonial periods, the domestic sphere of the family emerged as the terrain where Indian nationalism deployed its own project of modernization. The post independence Nehruvian era is known for its modernizing drive. However, as Ravi Vasudevan (2010) has argued through his analysis of *Andaaz* (1949), the desire to modernize was accompanied by an intense anxiety stemming from the prospect of women's freedom. This was often reflected in cinema. While a woman could be modern and free-willed, ultimately she needed to be contained by familial duties and morality. I propose that the Odia cinema of the sixties address two critical questions—a) What does it mean to be modern? b) What would be the place of woman in a modern society where she cannot and should not be brutally ascribed a subordinate position? If we take into account the titles of Odia films of 60s and 70s and even into the 80s, a pattern emerges. Most films are titled after the character/name/role of the female lead. To cite a few examples: *Aamari Gaan Jhua* ('A Girl from Our Village', 1953), *Maa* ('Mother,' 1959), *Nua Bou* ('The New Sister-in-law', 1962), *Naari* (‘Woman’, 1963), *Abhinetri* (‘Actress’, 1965), *Arundhati* (1967), *Stree* (‘Woman’, 1967), *Priyatama* (‘Beloved’, 1978) *Shankha Mahuri* (‘Conch and Horns’,1978), *Gauri* (1978), *Gruha Lakshmi* (‘The Lakshmi of the House’, 1983), *Badhu Nirupama* (‘A Daughter-in-law named Nirupama’,1987), *Bada Bhauja* (‘Eldest Sister-in-law’, 1988), *Bohu Heba Emiti* (‘This is How a Daughter-in-law Should be’, 1988). Each of these films fashion the idea of ideal womanhood. We see the emergence of a ‘new’ woman in the Odia cinema of the sixties in the context of the shaping of an Odia consciousness, at once modern but also tied to traditional upper caste Odia values.

Jharana Das: Embodying Modern Odia Womanhood

Jharana Das (1945-) was a highly respected actress of the period, who acted in several noted films like *Malajanha*, *Adina Megha*, *Amada Baata etc*. Due to her realistic and distinguished style of acting, she would often be popularly known by the name of a character she played, such as Sati of *Malajanha* or as Maya of *Amada Bata*.

Jharana Das’s fame and the place she holds in Odia cultural context can be understood only if we try to understand the modernity that she symbolized, coming from an educated middle class Christian background. Jharana Das belonged to a liberal family with a modern outlook. Though her forefathers were brahmins, the family had converted to Christianity. In the post-independence era, a significant number of people from Odisha had converted to Christianity. Especially upper caste Hindus were among the people who converted themselves to Christianity, attracted to its liberal ethos.[8]

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[8] See Pati (2001) for a historical analysis.

As a research assistant for a project carried out during 2013, I had the chance to conduct an extended interview with Jharana Das. Jharana's father owned large tracts of land and property in and around Cuttack. Her mother, a Bengali, was a major influence—and exposed her to Bengali culture and literature. Jharana acted in some plays staged by the progressive, left-oriented Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) during the 50s. She did not really have a significant phase in theatre unlike some of her contemporaries like Manimala or Chandana who had a glorious career at the popular Annapurna Theatre of Odisha by the time they entered the domain of cinema. But the ideology of the IPTA remained a great influence on her throughout. This probably led to her strong belief that an individual can and must fight against social obstacles and inequality.

When Jharana started acting, many of the other actresses within the field were from the popular theatre background. These actresses from stage background were not from the middle class and often lived and travelled with the theatre troupe. In an interview with Jharana Das in 2013, I got a sense that these other actresses were regarded as performing women, not having the same status as middle class upper caste actresses. According to Das, she was always accompanied by members of her family on the sets. She mentioned that she always dressed 'properly' and did not ever wear 'sleeveless' blouses that some other actresses wore. To quote her, 'I ensure that nobody looks at me in that way. I keep to myself and do my work. However, if someone still acts familiar in any fashion, I just give him a look. That is enough to rebuff them.' While Jharana was proud of her debut in the critically acclaimed film *Malajanha*, it bothered her that the heroine Sati committed suicide in the end. Her left-based IPTA background did not allow her to accept that a woman could bow down to social pressure and take the decision to die.

The first woman graduate to enter the world of cinema, known for her realist acting and personality, Jharana Das has been regarded as the icon of modern, dignified Odia womanhood. Even today she is a respected name in Odisha, and has held the post of Assistant Station Director of Doordarshan, Cuttack, indicating the state recognition she has achieved. She has also received the prestigious Jayadev award in 1997.

Manimala: Acclaimed but Forgotten

Another lead actress of that time was Manimala (1931-2016) who was an extremely popular artist from the famous Annapurna B theatre. Unlike Jharana Das, she came from a very poor family from Puri. It may be noted that there were two groups of actresses at this time. One group consisted of Jharana Das and Minati Mishra, who were from middle class/upper caste backgrounds. The other group of actresses entered the film industry from less privileged backgrounds, some of them from theatre. The Annapurna theatre group was a *natya mandali* earlier and transformed into a theatre at a latter stage by Bauri Bandhu Mohanty in 1936. It was a touring troupe in the initial stage. At that point of time, women of respectable families were not expected to be the part of theatre. In the early Odia cinema, the women’s roles were played by Bengali actresses or men dressed as women. So, it was a challenge for the women to act in theatre. After the demolition of Annapurna theatre group in 1960s, some of these actresses came to films (Singh 2008).

Born to poor parents, and orphaned at a young age, she was taken under the wings of famous theatre actress Radharani Devi and trained in dance and performance. Her son Shankar Ghose has said:

> My mother was an orphan. Noted actresses of her time such as Radharani Devi had encouraged her to act in Annapurna Theatre in Puri and Cuttack. But no one in her neighbourhood ever showed respect towards her. Rather, she was always looked down upon. Also, she never used to demand any honorarium for any film she acted in. Today, actresses decline offers to act in films if they are not paid the amount they seek. But, she used to remain happy for whatever she was offered. (Panda, 2012b)

Manimala was increasingly facing financial difficulties and was sidelined since the 70s. Despite getting the Jayadev Purashkar, the highest official honour for a theatre artist in Odisha, she did not receive any assistance and eventually died of ill health in difficult financial circumstances. While there is not a lot of detail about Manimala's early life and I could not interview her as she was paralyzed since 1989, bits and pieces of her background and early life reveal that she came from a social world very different from Jharana Das's. While she was a very popular and talented actress, it is an interesting question as to why she did not become the symbol of modernity in Odisha in the way that Jharana Das did.

I go on to discuss at length some landmark and and popular films of the 60s in the next section. Hopefully the analysis will bring out how cinema of this period is engaged to shape a notion of ideal womanhood that is authentically Odia and at the same time, strong and modern just to the right extent, without becoming any real threat to social arrangements.

Jharana Das and Akshaya Mohanty as Sati and Naatha in *Mala Janha* (Nitai Palit, 1965). Picture Courtesy: youtube.com

Jharana Das as Champak in *Adina Megha* (Amit Mitra, 1970). Courtesy: Odisha News Times

(Manimala Devi)
(Picture Courtesy: jajabara.com)

Section II

Malajanha ('The Dead Moon', 1965)

Nitai Palit's *Malajanha* is based on the acclaimed novel of the same name by Upendra Kishore Das (1901-1972), written in 1922. As Ganeswar Mishra has pointed out novels written during this period deal with exploitation and social narrowness faced by various individuals and portray the psychological conflicts of characters ('Literature: Novel/Prose', accessed August 2018, http://www.odisha.gov.in/content/odisha-profile/literature-novel-prose). Several of the novels such as Nanda Kishore Bala's *Kanakalata* (1925) and Vaishnav Charan Das's *Mane Mane* (Inside One's Heart, 1926) deal with the conflict between society and conjugal duties and desire and sexual attraction.[9] One can see why a novel of this kind appeals to the sensibility of Nitai Palit. Palit (1923-90), who made several critically acclaimed films during the 60s including *Malajanha*, was part of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) where he worked for many years as playwright, actor and director. He admired the works of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. He had already been the director of *Kedar Gouri* in 1954--a film dealing with the love story of two people from rival families. This film too was about star-crossed lovers who attempted to unite in face of social and familial opposition.

Sati, the female protagonist of *Malajanha*, is married off at a very young age to an elderly but wealthy widower, even though she is secretly attracted to a young man from her village, Natha. After marriage, she faces untold humiliation and neglect and must deal with the fact that her husband has an affair with a female domestic help of the house. Due to her aversion for her husband, she does not allow him to consummate the marriage. Once, when on an outing to a village fair, she is separated from her marital family and runs into her old friend Natha. When they make their way back to her husband's house, he casts aspersions on her honour and refuses to accept her back. We can clearly see a re-articulation of the Ramayana myth here, however, in this case Sati (literally, the chaste one) has so far remained physically 'pure' despite her attraction to Natha. She finally migrates to the big city, Cuttack, and attempts to set up a new family with the man she loves. However, social stigma and her own inner turmoil do not allow her to be happy. Eventually, she leaves Natha and commits suicide by drowning in a river.

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[9] I have also drawn on Mohanty (2008) to make this point. He talks at length about how the protagonists of early Odia novels such as *Malajanha* are torn by internal conflict whether to follow desire or to follow society.

Significantly, the character of Sati was played by Jharana Das. During an interview, she told me that Palit, when he first saw her in dressed as a village girl, said he had found his Sati. Similarly, Upendra Kishor Das also had complimented her on the way she portrayed the role of Sati. What was it about Jharana Das that she fitted this character so well? Sati in some ways projects a non-conventional femininity, different from the typical Odia womanhood. Jharana Das, highly educated and also from IPTA background, and with a flair for realist acting, obviously had a natural affinity with this character who dared to push social boundaries and question her 'destiny' despite her ultimate sacrifice.

Initially we witness Sati's unspoken desire for Natha and the strong emotional tie between them as they are thrown together during adolescence. After Sati is given in marriage to an elderly zamindar by her family simply because he is well off, and as a woman that is the best she could aspire for, she still cannot get rid of her feelings for Natha, and in her mind, keeps comparing her husband to the young Natha. When Nishi (Sati's friend who is also Natha's sister) asks her husband's name, the sound of the axe's cut on the wood from outside symbolizes her scattered dreams and aspirations. This reflects Sati's psychological turmoil as a woman who is married but experiences marriage as a violent suppression of her emotions.

In a shot where Sati sings a devotional song in front of the Radha Krishna idol — '*mora antara mana re rahi…*' (while dwelling inside my heart), the camera pans Sati's face, capturing her inner feelings and her constant silent desire for Natha's love. The camera's gaze shifts between Sati and the Radha-Krishna idol as the song speaks of the eternal bond between the lovers. The love between Radha and Krishna is symbolic of both divine and illegitimate love. The scene communicates the inner conflict of the heroine, caught between a loveless marriage and desire for a man who is not her husband. The conflict is between the heart and mind, the struggle between individual wish and expectations of the society**.**

As Natha and Sati return to the village from Cuttack due to lack of money, her saree gets stuck in the bullock cart, stopping her from moving forward. This scene signifies the society as an agency of control. The village children gaze at her out of curiosity; she is framed through their innocent gaze and made morally accountable. The burden of that gaze adds to her hesitation to move forward with Natha.

When Sati goes to her parental family for a visit from her marital home, it reminds her of old family ties, her parents, and the time spent in that home. Sati's visit to the parental house also reminds her of the familial control that had crushed her desires and aspirations as a young girl. A broken mirror symbolizes her broken dream, broken relationship and the lack of love despite being married. Sati's reaction to the space of the family seems to be a critique of the sanctified inner domain that was shaped as the core of national culture as discussed by Chatterjee (1989).

In the final scene, Sati writes a letter to Natha, telling him that while she always wanted him in her life she never wanted to possess him. Sati's love for Natha drives her to sacrifice her life so that he would not become an outcaste in the village.

The constant focus of the camera on Sati's eyes highlights her helplessness as a woman—a focus that is clearly intended to draw the spectator's sympathy and identification with her pain. In the end, we see Sati's footprints left on the river shore and the water washes them away slowly. The final scene captures the feelings of unfulfillment and the tragic end of a young woman's life, destroyed by societal norms and pressures.

Malajanha reflects the tension between modernity and tradition through depicting the conflicts faced by Sati. In the history of Odia cinema, for the first time, a film depicts unfamiliar emotions in a woman, addressing her love for a man outside the institution of marriage. Her suicide in the end is the only resolution that is possible, and her desire is contained through her sacrifice. Yet, it remains that the film represents 'illegitimate' desire of a woman and the audience is drawn into identifying with Sati.

The film reflects a deeply ambivalent attitude towards female sexuality, on the one hand it is registered and acknowledged, and on the other hand it must not be allowed to radically break with dominant codes of behaviour laid down for upper caste women. *Malajanha*'s success in box office proves that the audience accepted its theme despite its unconventionality. This leads us to recognize how the film mediated a woman's desire in a way that could be acceptable and would not radically clash with existing values. Sati's death is instrumental for this acceptance. From one point of view Sati has an insensitive husband who has an extra marital affair; it draws the audience sympathy for her. On the other hand, Sati cannot cross the societal boundaries as she is someone's wife and daughter in law. The film carries the burden of modernity and the task of shaping a middle class womanhood that is complex, posing a challenge to traditional norms yet must not destroy core social values. Sati's moral authority consolidates an upper caste middle class identity but her experience and desire are allowed to develop and find fruition. It is significant that Jharana Das, the actress playing Sati, was disappointed by the fate of the character and kept asking the director as to why must Sati commit suicide. Das's progressive IPTA background would have led her to wish for a more individualistic solution, not one that ended in the protagonist's choosing death.[10]

Matira Manisha **('Man of the Soil', 1966):**

Matira Manisha is based on the celebrated novel of Kalindi Charana Panigrahi (1901-1991), published in 1931. Panigrahi was one of the most celebrated writers of Odisha and one of the founders of *Sabuja samiti*, a Marxist group, established in 1920. As I have already mentioned, his novels combined Gandhian and Marxist ideologies, depicting the poverty and struggles of ordinary people. He adopted the idiom and language of common people, and his settings were mostly rural. The renowned Bengali film maker Mrinal Sen directed *Matira Manisha*. As mentioned in a website dedicated to Sen's work:

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[10] I am drawing on my interview with Jharana Das (2013).

> Working outside Bengal for the first time, Sen sets the film in Orissa. The film contrasts traditional and modern values as exemplified by divergent attitudes of two brothers to their inherited land. Such divergence in attitudes is intensified during war years when native exploiters and controllers of agrarian economy appear on the scene. Interestingly, no conclusion is drawn and no judgement is offered in the film. The spectator is asked to watch and, in the process, to get involved, to question.
>
> (‘Matira Manisha’, accesed March, 2018, http://mrinalsen.org/matira_manisha.htm)

The film was not successful in Odisha but it attracted a huge audience abroad in various film festivals. Mrinal Sen chose the text because of his ideological affiliation with the concept. He also changed the original text of the novel to suit the contexts of the 60s. As Shoma A. Chatterji (1998) recalls about Mrinal Sen, his greatest commitment was to (a) the story placed in a particular time setting, (b) his medium, cinema, to which he owed his ideological obligations and (c) his own time, which as he put it, ‘sits on my neck.’ These were the ‘three mistresses’ Sen felt he was serving.

The story of *Matira Manisha* is based on the tragic break down of a joint family in a village. The head of the family Shama Pradhan is well known in the village because of his helpful nature. After the death of the father, the story focuses on his two sons Baraju and Chakadi. The elder son Baraju fulfills all his responsibilities as a good father, good husband and good brother. But Sen’s understanding of this character is different from that in the novel. He also subtly represents this as the rule of patriarchy hidden beneath the apparent happiness and balance of the family. As he put it:

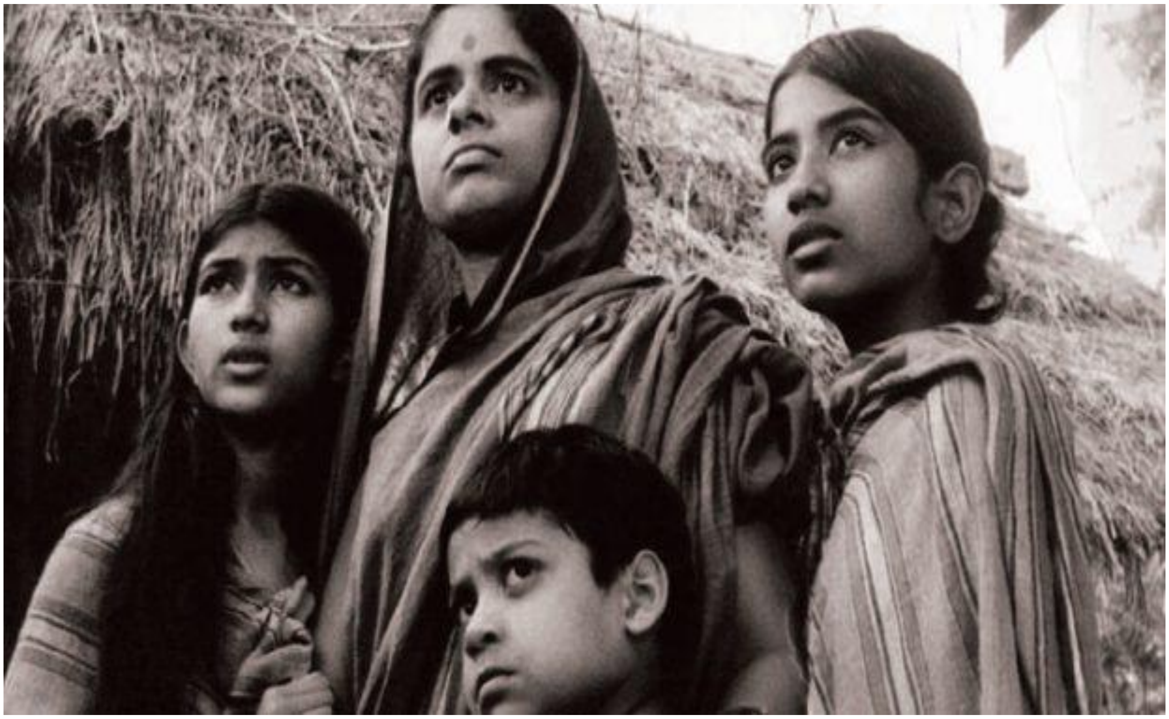
> The void created by the death of the father had to be filled, and it was the elder son who became the patriarch, the head of the family a good brother, a good husband, a good father. So far so good. But when I scanned the logic of events in the story, I discovered the rule of the patriarch hidden beneath the facade of a happy home. (‘On the Making of Matira Manisha’, Indiancine.ma, accessed April, 2018 http://indiancine.ma/documents/BEE)

The story involves two households: Baraju, his wife and three children and Chakadi and his newly married wife. Everything does not go well with the families after Chakadi’s marriage. With the death of the father Shama Pradhan, there are tensions between the brothers. To keep his promise to his father, Baraju becomes the father figure and sacrifices everything for the younger brother and leaves the house with his family. In the end, Chakadi realizes his fault and brings back Baraju and his family to their home.

In this film, Baraju, becomes the authority of the family in the absence of the older patriarch. He is determined to keep the family united in keeping with the promise he had made to his dying father, and to maintain the family’s reputation in the village. Chakadi, the younger brother is a fun-loving, carefree person. He has a poster of a woman in his room and always watches it with a smile on his face; the poster-woman is obviously the object of his fantasy. After he gets married, his wife posing next to the poster brings satisfaction to Chakadi’s face. The focus of the camera shifts between the new bride and the poster-woman. When Chakadi gets anklets for her wife, he tells her not to show others. The camera focuses on the bare feet of the elder sister-in-law and then on the feet of younger sister-in-law indicating the gaps—both material and temperamental--between the two. It is clear that Chakadi and his wife represent alien, selfish and western values—in terms of their sexuality, desires and disregard for the norms of the joint family.

Modes of modern transport such as the aeroplane or the train which are symbolic of modernity and technology recur through the film. Chakadi is the son of the peasant but nurses the aspiration to go the city and enjoy life. As he dreams, a train crosses the landscape at great speed foreboding a threat to the order of the village. The scene is reminiscent of the classic train scene from Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955). The flying aeroplanes over the village sky serve as a sign of change and arrival of the modernity which could pose a threat to the rural relationships.

Baraju's wife, Hara Bou does not approve of the ways of her sister-in-law. The younger woman's arrival in the family signals disruption. She brings with her alien, supposedly westernized values and does not believe in keeping the family together. Nor does she, in keeping with patriarchal traditions, show appropriate respect towards her elders, especially the elder sister-in-law. Once again, the family emerges as a critical site, in danger of corruption by external factors or modernity. The two women are set in opposition based on their relation to family—one is determined to protect it at any cost and the other is set to ruin its unity.



A still from *Matira Manisha* (Mrinal Sen,1966)

Here the two daughters-in-law start pointing out each other's fault in the absence of the mother-in-law who traditionally works as the controlling agent of the joint family especially within the domestic space. Baraju's wife is represented as an ideal wife. Though she is not very fond of Chakadi and his wife, as per the wishes of her husband, she sacrifices everything. We can see that Hara Bou's own will is not important; she must finally mould her self to suit the ideals and values of her husband and the patriarchal family. Through her decision to stand by her husband, she affirms his role as the Head of the family and in turn, the sanctity of the patriarchal family. On the other hand, the wife of Chakadi who is the daughter of a well-to-do family aspires to set up a separate household only with her husband. Her expectations are shown as a threat to the masculine authority of Chakadi as he is initially not keen on the division of property and separation from his elder brother. But he is again and again insulted by his wife, and must prove his status as husband by fulfilling her wish. Both Chakadi and Hara Bou are seen to be caught in difficult circumstances.

Significantly, when the exploitative village Head, Hari Mishra, passes an order forbidding the entire village from working in Baraju's field, a lower caste man, Dharama, decides to go against this unfair boycott and agrees to work for Baraju. He gets beaten by Hari Mishra's goons. But prior to taking such risk, he tells his wife that she could remarry if he were to lose his life due to the landlord's vengefulness. This clearly indicates remarriage is acceptable for the wife of a lower caste man. One may read this as Sen's comment on the rigid patriarchal relations of the upper caste family.

Directed by Sen, known for his left and IPTA associations and realist style, the film focuses on the exploitative socio-economic forces that creep into rural lives, disrupting its harmony and balance. But at the same time this is anchored to a family drama. Modernity can be exploitative, westernized and artificial but it is the moral strength of the woman which is projected as a counter to it.

Matira Manisha flopped at the box office but gained praise in international circuits. Perhaps this can be explained by Sen's naturalist style and realist approach. The producer wanted Sen to make certain changes, perhaps bring in a more melodramatic style, which he did not do, at the cost of upsetting the producer. Notably, Sen saw a resemblance between himself and Chakadi. Perhaps this was prompted by the dilemma that Chakadi was faced whether to adopt or not to adopt a modern lifestyle. For Chakadi, modernity comes at a cost; he loses his beloved brother and sister-in-law and is left with emptiness (‘On the Making of Matira Manisha’, Indiancine.ma, accessed April, 2018 http://indiancine.ma/documents/BEE).

As I had indicated earlier the loss of the ideal family can also be read as nostalgia for the patriarchal order. Sen’s film reflects this ambivalence. Perhaps that is why it could not be so whole-heartedly accepted by the Odia audience as they had accepted *Malajanha*. As noted actor Prashanta Nanda, who played Chakadi in the film, put it:

> Kalindi Charana Panigrahi's works were read widely by people. They were shocked to see the director's attempt to tweak the original story and quick to disapprove of the idea. The director's communist leaning was evident in the presentation of the film and dialogues
> (‘Not just Padmavati, even Odia movies were mired in controversy’, DailyHunt, 20 Novermber, 2015, https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/odisha+sun+times-epaper-osuntime/not+just+padmavati+even+odia+movies+were+mired+in+controversy-newsid-76655588).

It is indeed interesting that Sen posed a question to the man, the financier Babulal Doshi, who initially met him with the money to finance the film: ‘Would you agree that the wife of the younger brother was unduly treated with indifference, and that she was sadly underprivileged within the family’ (‘On the Making of Matira Manisha’, Indiancine.ma, accessed April, 2018, http://indiancine.ma/documents/BEE). Obviously, the producer was shocked.

Adina Megha ('The Unseasonal Cloud', 1970)

Adina Megha was made in 1970 by director Amit Maitra who had directed the Hindi classic *Jagte Raho* ('Stay Awake', 1956), written by the noted progressive writer K. A. Abbas. The film talks about family and kinship ties, love and the helplessness of the individual in a relationship. The film starts with the scene of a palmist reading the palms of young men in a hostel room. While all of them are concentrating on it, one person is busy doing his own work and says that there is nothing like fate, an individual should fight his own battle. This is Suresh who takes up the challenge to impress a beautiful, modern college girl named Champak (played by Jharana Das) and wins it. Champak is from a modern, educated family. The family has spent most of their time outside Odisha because of the father's job. The servant Sadhu's conversation in broken English represents his aspiration to be like his superiors and also the exposure of the family to western culture to an extent such that even the servant speaks English.

Suresh's family consists of his elder brother, sister-in-law and their children. They choose a girl named Alka as a prospective bride for Suresh. But he rejects the proposal, saying that she is an uneducated village girl. Subsequently, Suresh gets married to Veena in a moment of chivalry when the latter is abandoned by her fiancé but cannot bring himself to reveal this to Champak and her family. Alka also gets married to an educated young man from the city but is constantly insulted by her husband for being an uneducated village girl. However, overcoming such insults, she begins her own education under her husband's supervision. After the sudden death of her husband, her only goal in life is to uplift the lives of rural children through education.

When Champak comes to meet Suresh, she runs into his wife, Veena and eventually learns about their marriage. As Suresh comes into this scene, the camera projects him between these two women as if caught in a dilemma, shifting the spectator's attention from the humiliation faced by both women. The film mediates the 'modern' woman yet again through invoking mythological ideals like Sita, Radha or Meera. Despite Suresh's betrayal and deceitful acts, Champak's love for him remains unchanged, resembling Meera's devotion towards Krishna. Veena, on the other hand, has to die as her love for Suresh is one-sided. It is her death that facilitates the union of Champak and Suresh. The third woman in the film, Alka is represented as the object of reform by her husband, despite the initial humiliation he subjects her to. After his death, she is no longer a woman with desires but is represented as the nurturing mother to the village children. Chakravarti (1995) had argued that in the upper caste structures of the 19th century, the husband's death meant social and sexual death for the woman. In *Adina Megha*, Alka finds a new career devoted to an important social cause. Yet, the question of her desire is suppressed despite the reformist re-interpretation. It is only Suresh who gets to fulfill his desires and gets on with his life without any disruption; he gets married to his earlier love who has been waiting for him all the time, and accepts him without any reproach. All three women—uneducated or modern—gain meaning only through the support they provide to the male characters and how they are re-fashioned by the men in their lives.

In the cinema of 60s, we repeatedly encounter women with desires and aspirations that pose a challenge to the normative order of the Odia upper caste society. These women, significantly, are not vamps or 'bad women' and play critical roles within the family. In fact, as in *Malajanha*, the films bring out their pain and loss with empathy, often making a harsh comment on societal exploitation and discrimination. These women are portrayed within a reformist discourse, with certain distinguishing marks of modernity in terms of their education and sexuality and what they expect out of life. As we have seen, Mrinal Sen gives a certain dignity even to the younger daughter-in-law in *Matira Manisha* despite the fact that she is projected as the bearer of bad modernity and westernization in the original novel. Despite these glimpses of strong, desiring women, the films often shift the problem from the society to the inner psychological domain of the woman—most obvious in *Malajanha* among the films I have analyzed. Still, in these films, questions such as women's individuality and modernity are addressed in seriousness, and there is an uncomfortable questioning of the patriarchal family despite the final resolution that manages to restore equilibrium. In the subsequent chapter, I look at a stronger and renewed consolidation of the Odia normative family and society in the face of challenges from the margins.

Chapter IV

Re-consolidating the Family: The Turbulent 70s

Towards the end of sixties, the Indian nation witnessed popular unrest and severe discontent among various sections of the society. The promise of Nehruvian government—of equality and progress—remained unfulfilled for several groups and the contradictions and inequalities of the post independence Nehruvian state become increasingly visible. This resulted in large scale protests and agitations by groups that faced social and economic marginalization—women, workers, tribals and peasants. Simultaneously, a different set of challenges emerged from the Right, which held the Nehruvian ideologies of socialism and secularism responsible for the moral collapse of the nation and called for a spiritual revolution. Aligned with the Rights' critique of socialism, was the emergence of a competitive middle class in the seventies that favored collaboration with foreign capital and the opening up of market. It demanded a masculinization of self in place of 'special rights' granted by the State for the weaker and disadvantaged groups of the society.[11] According to Rajni Kothari (1990, 216-219), 'the early 1970s saw social protest concentrated in India's cities and towns. A whole new generation of unemployed youth, who saw little in the inflated claims of developmentalism, took to the streets'. The growing industrialization widened the gap between the classes. The voice of the downtrodden became more and more loud. Chatterjee (1998, 53) argues that capitalism of a sort made rapid inroads into Indian agriculture from around 1966 under the banner of the 'green revolution'. In spite of this much-heralded 'breakthrough', it turned out that per capita production of food grains grew at a slower rate in the 1960s than in the 1950s and whatever growth did occur, it remained restricted to specific regions and among owners of large holdings. This gave control to specific groups of people of particular region over agriculture.

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[11] See Chatterjee (1998) and Sreenivas (2010) for discussion of these aspects.

Between 1975 and 1977, a state of emergency was imposed on the county by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. As Prasad (1998, 119-120) writes:

> While one segment of the communist left was making political gains through participation in the electoral process, another maoist segment aligned itself with the rebellious peasantry and rural working class and appeared to be gaining ground in the countryside. Urban working class militancy was at its peak in this period and a combination of forces led by the ex-socialist Jayaprakash Narayan mounted a strong offensive against congress dominance.

During the 70s a more authoritarian and top-down government comes into play. Indira Gandhi's authoritarian and unrealistic approach landed her in a deep political crisis. For instance, the forced sterilization programme was imposed as the solution to the country's economic/population problems and the beautification of the capital cities was viewed as a step towards the improvement of the society. According to Kaviraj (1986, 1707):

> The federal structure of the Congress was destroyed, giving rise to a more centralised but less effective state apparatus—particularly because of her

equation of the strength of the nation with power of the Central government.

The political crisis of the nation had a longlasting impact on the society and cultural forms as well. The films of this period opened up a space for new kind of social relationship. The films which earlier had romantic love as its content made a shift to more current issues concerning a rebellious youth, social discontent and the questions about sexual exploitation and gender discrimination posed from within the women's movement. Prasad (1998, 121) has analyzed that the significant factor behind the transformation was, the politicization and mobilization of the masses, as also the state sponsored movement that sought to give substance to the idea of a national cinema.

In 1969 the Film Finance Corporation was established by the government. Between 1971 and 1975, the Indian government directed the state owned Film Finance Corporation to fund independent cinema with a view to turn the medium into an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education and healthy entertainment. The screen space that had until then been taken up by films which struck to a strictly melodramatic formula for commercial success, became available to alternative cinema. Government interest in cinema ensured that relatively easy loans were in principle available to those willing to make what the government considered meaningful films. But these government initiatives proved unsuccessful. Many of the successful films were privately funded and after 1975 the government chose to pursue its developmental agenda through state-run television rather than through films. Indira Gandhi's strong supporter and the Information and Broadcasting ministers in her cabinet, I.K. Gujral in a speech told the film industry that they would have to pay 'social tax' if they wanted to reduce the entertainment tax. Nandini Satpathy who was the Chief Minister of Odisha between 1972 to 1976, and a strong supporter of Indira Gandhi, echoed this statement. The government called for a commitment from the industry to produce films with progressive themes. Some segments of the industry attempted to provide cultural support for the development goals of the government. However, the industry did not get much support from the government and the president of Film Federation of India, Sunderlala Nahata called for internal unity and discipline as the way to avoid government interference**.** Due to lack of sufficient funds, the government-sponsored films did not succeed, while the private funded films did better businesses.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section I discusses some of the key trends and contexts that influenced Odia cinema of the 70s. Section II consists of the analysis of specific films.

Section I

The Emergence of the Angry Young Man

In the Indian context, only a small section of the audience watched foreign films and art films and a large section of the audience depended on mainstream cinema for entertainment, a fact that is largely true even now. The mainstream films of the seventies, especially Hindi cinema, combined social questions with the discontent, aspirations and viewing habits of a popular audience. In popular Hindi cinema, we find the rise of a new trend where a star persona carries the burden of ideological struggles. As Prasad (1998) has pointed out, the star, most famously Amitabh Bachchan, emerged as a mobilizer of the masses. He played the character of an ordinary person—a mill or dock worker, a porter or a miner—who rebelled against the system and its injustices. Such was the strength of his persona and star power that he could get ordinary viewers to identify with him even as they were in awe. In films like *Deewar* (1975), *Zanzeer* (1973), Bachchan played the roles of the disgruntled common man—the worker, the rebel—connecting with the discontent in the society among the middle and the working classes. Thus a new middle class hero was born, replacing the older romantic hero in Hindi cinema. Prasad (1998) has discussed the 'angry young man' phenomenon at length.[12]

Odia cinema also sees some notable changes in this period. Some of the significant films of this period are *Jajabara* ('Nomad', 1975), *Shesha Sravana* ('The Last Monsoon', 1976), *Gapa Hele bi Sata* ('A Story yet True', 1976), *Balidana ('The Sacrifice', 1978)*, etc.

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[12] The discussion on angry young man is drawn from Prasad (1998).

We notice that the ‘modern’ in Odia cinema of the 70s increasingly assumes negative connotations and is equated with ‘westernization’, moving from the more complex portrayals of the 60s. The cabaret dance becomes a staple occurrence in most of the films. It is the ‘vamp’ who performs the cabaret, wearing revealing ‘western’ clothes. As Ranjani Mazumdar (2007, 86) has stated: ‘the vamp was a visible intrusion of the west into the cinematic space of Indian films, signifying an unrestrained sexuality and license, given to vices “unknown” to “Indian” women. The vamp was the outsider, distinct from the iconic woman of the nation’. The display of sexuality was restricted to certain places like the nightclub, bar and casino. The representation of the purity of the nation was negotiated through the heroine, though she could also be modern in a different way. For example, in Hindi cinema of the 70s, Zeenat Aman always played the role of the heroine, though she wore western outfits in most of her films. She was always represented as the liberated, westernized woman. Her style was projected as a new fashion trend addressed to the youth.

1970s mark the opening of Odisha office of Eastern India AAA Motion Pictures association (EIMPA) at Cuttack in 1970 and also the formation of Odisha Film Development Corporation (OFDC) in 1976. The number of films as well as the number of cinema theatres increased significantly. The first colur Odia film *Gapa Hele bi Sata* was released in 1976 and the second color Odia film *Shesha Shrabana* was also released in the same year. (Singh 2008). The latter got the national award and was remade in Hindi as *Nayya*. *Jajabara, Maniini, Maa o Mamata, Balidana, Samar Salim Simon, Sankha Mahuri, Dharitri* are some of the well known films of this time. The dominant themes in most films were the issues of class difference, interference of western values into families and the re-consolidation of family.

Subaltern Resistances in Odisha

Odisha too saw many popular uprisings since the late 1960s. The Maoist movement in the state can be traced back to that period. In 1968, a police station in Chitrakonda was raided by Maoists. The Odisha State Coordination Committee (OSCC) of the Maoist movement was formed in 1967 under the leadership of Nagabhushan Patnaik and it expressed solidarity with the Naxalbari movement led by Charu Mazumdar. Anshuman Behera (2016, 8) writes:

> Initial communist movements in the form of people's resistance movement were seen in the districts of Ganjam and Koraput, both bordering Andhra Pradesh. Some of these resistance movements were: movement against the Bethi (Slavery) practice in undivided Koraput district, movement against moneylenders in Ganjam and Koraput district, protest against the Gothi (Bonded labour) practice and protest against the forest officers, police and local landlords' nexus, food liberation protest in Koraput. These movements were the stepping stone of the radical communist movement in Odisha.

Discussing the political conditions of Odisha in post-colonial period, Manoranjan Mohanty (1990, 340) has written that 'politics in post-independence Orissa continued to be dominated by the brahman-karan middle class'. According to Mohanty (1990), the Dalits and the poor continued to be marginalized in education, land ownership and control of bureaucracy or politics. Below I discuss one of the popular films of the 70s called *Jajabara* which is about the unfair control of land. But while the film represents the upper caste hero as the leader of the masses, Mohanty has pointed out how land reforms in Odisha had limited results and how pre-capitalist relations continued to control agriculture.

In the above light, I discuss below certain dominant trends in cinema of this time in order to bring out how cinema becomes an instrument of cultural hegemony and reconciliation during the troubled times of the 70s.

Section II

Jajabara ('Nomad', 1975)

The film *Jajabara* (1975) starts with the song '*jajabra mana mora*' (my heart is an aimless nomad) playing in the background. The film is about a carefree western educated modern man, who fights injustice and goes out of his comfort zone to marry a girl of lower class. He is projected as radical in every way. Unlike his father, he does not believe in ritual worship or in superstitions.

The film centres on the conflicts in a feudal-patriarchal family which is also in the process of tying up with capitalist interests. The landlord Rash Bihari Samantrai has two sons named Anu and Arup respectively. Each of the male members of the family represents a position. The father, feudal in his outlook, follows the words of his religious guru, and promises to donate *Sundari Tota*, a land belonging to him for the purpose of building an *ashram*. On the other hand, the elder son, Anu, is an industrialist and plans to start an industry in *Sundari Tota*. However, *Sundari Tota* has been the habitat of the village folks for a long time, and they plead with Rash Bihari not evacuate them form the land occupied by them for years. As we can see the film, through this narrative, addresses the issue of the growing discontent and protest among disenfranchised and landless peasants.

However, the second son Arup falls in love with an uneducated and poor village girl Jhilli and leads the village people in rebelling against his father's decision. There is conflict between the elder son Anu and the father as well, but in that case, it is a conflict between feudalism and capitalism, both shown as exploitative. It is the younger son who carries the moral responsibility of leading the people and their cause. We also see him through Jhilli's admiring gaze. There is a sequence where she and her friend make fun of the village men who do not have voice. The friend says that only the younger landlord, the hero has a voice, which stands out and has an understanding of the common people's problems. This young landlord can take a stand when required. The hero's revolutionary masculinity is celebrated in these two women's conversation. He is projected as the leader. On the one hand, the feudal lord and the capitalist elder son are challenged. On the other hand, a new masculine authority emerges, one who leads the people. Arup is not romantically interested in a woman of his own social strata (his sister-in-law's younger sister who is considered to be suitable for him), wears western clothes and repeatedly says that he is not the part of the family trademark but is unique.

Significantly, another man of the village, (Paria, a Dalit) is also in love with Jhilli but she 'chooses' Arup. Historical accounts of the period would tell us that the subaltern struggles were led by tribals, dalits and workers. Yet, Paria is sidelined in two ways. Jhilli, the woman protagonist of the story, is not romantically interested in him. Second, the revolutionary speeches and admiration of the people are reserved for the hero, Arup, who says that the time is gone when people worked as slaves. So the film, even as it uses the language of class uprisings, subtly re-establishes gender and class relations.

When Jhilli's father comes to know about the relationship between his daughter and the younger landlord, he tries to convince Jhilli that marriage between the two is not possible because of class difference. As per his traditional wisdom, marriage should be in the same class with familial approval. In most of the films of 70s the question of class difference emerged through the conflicts ensuing from heterosexual love affairs. These films try to narrow the gap of class through portraying the love between the hero and the heroine belonging to different class backgrounds. While the love between Arup and Jhilli serves a similar purpose, certain sequences give away how Jhilli needs to be re-formed to 'rise above' her class. In one scene, she comes to a function at the hero's house, dressed like an upper caste woman in order to meet the expectations of his class.

It is interesting to see how gender functions to negotiate and manage class related tensions in the film. When Paria, the Dalit admirer of Jhilli comes to learn of her relationship with Arup, he looks at it as a form of manipulation by the privileged classes that threatens his masculinity. While this romantic triangle gives rise to certain critical questions relating to class and masculinity, it is given an acceptable and non-threatening resolution. Jhilli eventually tries to commit suicide as she does not want to become an obstacle for any one. Her attempt to carry out such a great sacrifice overshadows all other tensions and conflicts. The hero rescues her, and his father, the landlord finally accepts Jhilli as a daughter-in-law. By attempting to take her own life for the well-being of others, Jhilli proves to the upper caste/class family of the hero that she is truly in love with him and not interested in material benefit. Jhilli’s decision to sacrifice her life rather than become a threat to the existing order, re-establishes her as the ideal Odia woman, fit to be a wife and a daughter-in-law of an aristocratic family. It redeems her and makes her qualified to enter a class higher than hers. It is notable that at the same point of time, Dalits, tribals and the poor start demanding their just right in different parts of India including Odisha. *Jajabara*, addresses this resistance but appropriates it by representing the heroine as someone who must prove herself as worthy of entering the upper caste household.

Interestingly, Odia cinema discovers its angry young man in Sriram Panda, the tall, brooding actor who plays Arup. Sriram Panda continued to play the rebellious young man in most of his films. He came to be known for his trademark style of smoking endless cigarettes. Many youth of Odisha started smoking cigarettes after seeing him in an advertisement for the then famous Cavendar cigarettes. He was the first Odia hero to have been chosen as a model for Cavendar cigarettes. His devil-may-care attitude and handsome look on the screen encashed on his real life persona.

(Sriram Panda, Picture Courtesy: jajabara.com)

***Shesha Shrabana* (‘The Last Monsoon’, 1976)**

Shesha Shrabana once again addresses the brewing caste tensions in Odisha through a soulful love story between a lower caste man and a brahmin woman—an unthinkable idea the in upper caste hegemonic culture of the state. Sania, a fisher man saves a brahmin girl named Manika when she floats up in the river during a flood. She starts living with Sania and his mother in their home.

With time their affection for each other grows stronger. The villagers start gossiping about their relationship and threaten Sania to leave Manika in her home or else they would outcaste him. Sania takes Manika back to her home but upon seeing her father’s helplessness and her step mother’s behaviour towards her, he decides to take her back.

The upper caste people of the village also raise questions about Manika’s ‘purity’ as she has stayed in a fisherman’s home. Significantly, while Manika acknowledges her love for Sania, his feelings towards her are left unnamed. The film does not transgress the societal boundary that forbids a lower caste man to dare to have such feelings for an upper caste woman. As historian Uma Chakravarti (1995) has pointed out women are regarded as the gateways to caste system. The woman is the repository of caste honour/purity, and any transgression by her is regarded as threat and is controlled with violence/punishment by the social order. Against this ideological backdrop, the film makes some interesting moves in trying to represent the love between Sania and Manika. The song ‘*jhure rai parana*, *shyama ki bujhe ta mana*’ (Radha’s heart cries, but Shyam cannot understand her feelings) transforms their love into a divine love, re-figured in terms of the love between Radha and Krishna.

(A still from *Shesha Shrabana*, Prashant Nanda,1976. Picture Courtesy: jajabara.com)

The film also shows Sania’s respect for caste boundaries. He makes attempt to find a ‘suitable’ bridegroom for Manika, belonging to her own caste. The film foregrounds the lower caste man's adherence to endogamy—so while he is a good man—he also knows his station and thus, does not become a threat. However, the educated doctor who agrees to marry Manika dies in an accident. Sania himself tries to get married to a woman from his own caste but that too does not materialize due to the conspiracy of the village people. In the end, when Sania has fever, Manika is forced to go the to the village landlord Nidhi Mishra for money and is raped by him. She then commits suicide—as an upper caste woman who has lost her 'honour', that appears to be the only option left for her. Distraught with grief, Sania becomes insane after her death.

As we have already seen, 'suicide' appears as a resolution to difficult questions of class, gender and caste related inequalities. One of the lovers, in fact, always the woman, has to sacrifice her love or commit suicide and the conflicts of caste/class remain unaddressed. Also interesting is the fact that at a moment when the nation and Odia society are undergoing conflicts and violence resulting from class/caste inequalities, Sania is never shown as a potential threat. Instead, he is a good hearted but docile man and his only reaction to Manika's death is going insane—a loss of his mental faculties. There is no rebellion against the patriarchal upper caste structures which did violence to both him and Manika, his beloved.

I would like to point out a contrast between Manika and another girl from the village Gouri. Their bodies, clothing, demeanour, conversational styles are coded very differently. Manika, being an upper caste Brahmin girl, wears full length saree, wrapping the *pallu* around her body. She is soft-spoken and submissive. Though she stays in a fisherman's house, she maintains the upper caste code of conduct. She usually does not go out alone; does not talk to strangers. Her caste is coded into her body and conduct, even when no one knows her social background. Gouri (a lower caste girl), on the other hand, wears knee length saree and roams around the village, freely talking to others. She regularly goes to Sania's house without any escort. The different dressing styles, indeed the bodies of the two heroines Manika and Gouri, point to the difference of caste between the two of them.

Balidana **('The Sacrifice', 1978)**

The film is about a poor peasant family and its struggle for existence. Jagata is a poor farmer of the village. He takes money from the landlord to get married to Lakshmi. The poor couple earns their livelihood from their small piece of land. Jagata tells Laxmi that he is an orphan and has nothing except his land. Laxmi assures him that it is their duty to take care of the land which is his parental property. With time they become parents of two sons: Aju and Raju. Aju is shown as a calm and studious boy. His teacher at school has a revolutionary bent, and is against the feudal systems still persisting in Independent India. On the occasion of Independence Day, he sings '*bahi jae re ganga, udi jae tiranga*' (The Ganga keeps flowing and the tricolor keeps flying) with the school students joining the chorus. Even as the song starts on a patriotic note, the teacher subverts the first line by going on to speak of the steep hike in prices, the poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor that besets the country. The camera also focuses on the angry and discomfited gaze of the authorities of the school. The song acts as a commentary on the political and social situation of the 70s and also on the main plot of the film.

The landlord usurps all the land and bullocks of Jagata for not being able to pay the interest of the loan he had taken from him. We can see the influence of socialist films like Bimal Roy’s *Do Bigah Zameen* (1953) in the way the film projects the uprightness the peasant in dire situations. Jagata’s family undergoes tremendous suffering as a result of the injustice perpetrated on them. However, the way the film presents their reaction is crucial. It is their devotion to the lord Jagannath that keeps them together through trying times.

In a prayer in front of the idol of Jagannath, the whole family together sings that whatever may happen they will stand for truth. Ironically, it is written on the wall of the house that, to tolerate injustice is as much of a crime as to do injustice. The song highlights familial unity and the moral values that must be inculcated in the children of the poor so that they are honest even in the face of poverty and deprivation. The family and its faith in Jagannath emerge as an alternatie and bulwark against class-based revolutionary tensions in the society.

In this context, I would like to refer to the critique of Jagannath cult by Mohanty (1990, 356). According to him upper caste domination in Odisha is not only due to political and economic advantages but also because of cultural hegemony, and ‘at the centre of this symbol lays the Jagannath cult’. He argues that the Jagannath culture emerged out of an appropriation of tribal deities for the legitimation of royal and upper caste power (Mohanty 1990, 357). He further asserts: ‘The Jagannath cult has remained not only the dominant cultural symbol of Orissa, but also an instrument of legitimation of dominance by the upper classes, and the upper castes’ (Mohanty 1990, 358). Mohanty contends that while the Jagannath culture is often represented as egalitarian by the upper castes, it is used as a tool to strengthen caste hierarchy. One may read the devotion of the exploited peasant family to Jagannath (instead of adopting a revolutionary path) against this backdrop.

After losing everything, Jagata dies due to ill health caused by all the suffering. Lakshmi and her two children struggle to sustain the household. Yet when Jagata's friend asks Lakshmi, who is like his sister-in-law, to stay in his house with the children in order to stay safe from the landlord, she turns down the offer by saying that she cannot leave the house and only death can separate her from the house. In Lakshmi, we see strong shades of Mehboob Khan's Mother India (*Mother India*, 1957). Her devotion to the family, the land, the house and the village are unparalleled. She is also the symbol of sacrifice and chastity in the face of hardship. Like Radha of *Mother India* she has two sons, one of whom is quiet and submissive while the other is angry and rebellious. Aju, the elder son is lost and adopted by a rich couple. Eventually, Aju becomes a successful business man and Raju grows up all the time dreaming to take revenge upon the landlord. Raju ultimately rebels against the landlord and is jailed, charged with conspiracy. There Raju meets his brother's childhood school teacher who had turned a naxalite later and was subsequently captured and put in jail. Raju too joins the group and gets trained to fight against an 'unjust system'. Significantly, in the film the naxalites are described as 'dacoits'. As Prasad (1998, 158) has argued in his discussion of *Sholay* (1975), the iconic Hindi film that preceded the release of *Balidan*:

> In Sholay the dacoit figure is evacuated of all social content, has no personal history. Pitted against the legitimate rule of the landlord, his political ambitions are not supported by any manifesto whether personal or social.

> The film stages the triumph of Law over the intransigent political order of the countryside which threatens…the landed bourgeoisie.

Raju's mother Lakshmi once again exercises a gendered moral authority like Radha of 'Mother India'. When she hears that Raju has joined the 'dacoit gang' she declares that Raju is dead for her. One may recall that in *Mother India* Radha had shot down her own favourite younger son Birju for having kidnapped the landlord's daughter. Thus, she had emerged as the 'protecter' of the honour of the women of the village, overshadowing the exploitative class and caste relations of the village.

Raju and Gouri, the landlord's daughter, fall in love despite the wide social difference between them. We can see again and again in Odia cinema, especially in those of the 70s, that love between a man and a woman belonging to different classes, appears as a cementing factor for the society. In the climax, the landlord is murdered by the teacher, taking off the possibility of any real rebellion on part of the hero, Raju. His brother Aju gets back his lost memory, Raju's goal to take revenge is achieved without him getting involved in any real violence and the brothers get their land back. Thus, the film has a happy ending and the underlying tensions are resolved.

It is important to underscore that the mother, Lakshmi (named after the goddess of domesticity and prosperity) remains the moral centre of the film—as ideal wife, ideal mother and ideal woman. She controls her 'wayward' son with moral force, and he never really becomes a 'naxalite'—the teacher takes on the burden and is quietly dispensed with. On the other hand, Raju is re-appropriated into the family structure. It is significant that his wife's name is also that of a goddess—Gouri.

Thus, one can say that gender has the critical function of regulating caste relations in this film.

Gapa Hele bi Sata **('A Story Yet True', 1976)**

The film starts with a close up top shot of the Puri Jagannath temple. Then the camera shifts focus to a big building in the city, which belongs to a rich, aristocratic family. The family consists of the father, mother, daughter Sushma and her two children and son Rajesh who is out on a vacation with friends. In the opening scene the mother seems worried and asks an astrologer about her daughter's future, as she continues to stay in the parental house with her children, away from her husband's family. She also asks about the marriage prospects of the son Rajesh who does not believe in that institution. In these few early scenes, a connection is established between the Jagannath temple, hegemonic Odia religiosity, wealth and the Odia family in the narrative. We also sense that this is a slightly 'dysfunctional' family in need of moral rejuvenation.

The son and heir of the family, is a modern Casanova, devoting his time to women and parties. He has an affair with a woman named Dolly and visits the Konark temple with her and other friends. The educated city girls are represented as the bad face of modernity, sexually available, westernized and without any morals. During the trip to Konark, Rajesh sees a village girl, Uma—innocent, shy and submissive—in every sense the opposite of Dolly. Attracted by her beauty and innocence, he is drawn to her and wants to have a relationship with her.

In one particular scene, he is shown following Uma as she sings about her dream lover, oblivious of his presence. He then watches her bathing in the river. Uma is framed as a sexual object/prey through his voyeuristic gaze. His gaze does not require her consent or agency. I would like to refer to certain dialogues as examples of the objectification of both Uma and Dolly. As an occupation, she sells dolls in front of the temple. Rajesh tells her that the doll she sells is very beautiful and he would want to buy it at any cost. Symbolically, Uma is also a doll for him.

At this point, Dolly says that people do not come to Konark to buy those dolls; they want the naked ones excavated on the temple's wall. Uma retorts that while people may see the external statues on the walls of the temple, there is a deity inside. Here the exchange between the two women reflects their two positions: one symbolizes unrestrained sexuality while the other stands for spiritual purity. It is significant that while the hero uses both the women as objects, the focus is not so much on this patriarchal sexual exploitation but on the essentialized difference between the 'good' woman and the 'bad' woman.

The village landlord visits Uma's aunt with a proposal to marry her niece. When the aunt says that Uma is of his daughter's age, the landlord retorts that age does not count for a man. Following this exchange, Uma's aunt informs her of the landlord's proposal and pesters her about the difficulties of keeping unmarried grown up girls at home.

We can see that while both the landlord and Rajesh are intent upon the sexual exploitation of Uma, the film's sympathies lie with Rajesh. The landlord is a familiar figure of exploitation and lechery in Odia cinema (as in most Indian cinema). He can be clearly demonized as evil and exploitative. But the film does not equally strongly address the exploitative aspects of the modern and educated middle class with cultural capital. On the other hand, it concentrates the transforming effect of Uma on Rajesh.

Gradually Uma grows feelings for Rajesh. One night she goes out to meet Rajesh. Rajesh marries her in the temple so that he can gain sexual access to her. The next day when the landlord comes to marry Uma, she says that she is already married. But subsequently, she comes to know that Rajesh has already left the place. The landlord mocks her saying that since no one will marry her after knowing this, she can stay as a maid in his house.

A distraught and heartbroken Uma leaves home and walks for miles aimlessly in search of Rajesh. Finally, she faints on the roadside and is found coincidentally by Rajesh's mother passing by in a car and is taken to the hospital. When she comes to know that Uma has no one to depend on, out of a kind of feudal benevolence, she takes her home as a maid. From then on, Uma lives in Rajesh's house serving the family. On one occasion she saves his father by donating blood. We know that donating blood is the ultimate mode of sacrifice and reconciliation in Indian melodramatic cinema. In Bimal Roy's classic film *Sujata* (1959), the female protagonist 'low-born' Sujata is wholeheartedly accepted into her adoptive home only after she donates blood to save her adoptive mother's life.

A series of events facilitate Uma's integration into Rajesh's family and his acceptance of her as a wife. Even when she realizes she is in Rajesh's home, she accepts it as her fate and chooses to continue as a maid. Rajesh first discovers her in his own house in front of the Radha-Krishna idol, the family deity. But he continues to ignore her. In one scene, as Rajesh comes down the staircase of the palatial house, he sees Uma standing below. The gaze of the camera and the gaze of the hero place her in a subordinate position. She must accept this positioning with all humility for her to be made acceptable as the wife of the son of the family who had so ruthlessly discarded her after using her sexually.

This needs to be problematized in the context of the feminist movement which during the 70s repeatedly focused on the subordinated position of woman in the household and demanded justice for the sexual and other kinds of violence she was subjected to. Ironically, even though produced contemporaneous to the women's movement of the 70s, in *Gapa Hele bi Sata,* a 'victim' of sexual exploitation not only accepts her fate but carries the added responsibility to convince the hero that she is 'worthy' of him. Going back to the above mentioned scene, Uma touches the ground that Rajesh has just walked on, and puts the dust on her forehead. This gesture of servility seals her status as the rightful 'wife' of Rajesh.

Further, when Uma narrates her story in the form of a lullaby to the children of Sushma, the little girl says that the prince of the story is 'bad'. However, Uma restrains her and says that the prince is not bad; it is the fate of the girl that is bad. Finally, Rajesh realizes his 'mistake' and decides to marry Uma instead of the girl from his own social background chosen by his father. An old servant Keshav Kaka who had raised Rajesh as a child, becomes his confidant and helps him to make this decision. Further, such is the impact of Uma's moral presence in the family that Sushma who had left her marital family and stayed at her parents' place drops her 'ego' and goes back to her husband's place, realizing that that is the ultimate 'haven' for a woman.

As I have mentioned earlier, *Gapa Hele Bi Sata* (and the other films discussed above) is an example of the way in which gender becomes a factor to control and contain the conflicts in the society. In this film, the divides across urban-rural and class are appropriated through the sacrifice of a woman named Uma, equating her to the goddess. Ironically this was also the period of vibrant women's movement in the country. Women's groups brought to the forefront issues of rape, dowry, sexual exploitation, domestic violence etc. In 1972, the rape of a tribal girl Mathura in police custody shook up the country and women's groups challenged a patriarchal judgement of the Sessions Court that placed the responsibility for the rape on Mathura herself, stating that she was 'habituated to sexual intercourse'. This was later upturned by the District Court but upheld by the Supreme Court leading to outrage among women's and lawyers' groups. A group of committed lawyers later wrote an open letter to the Chief Justice of India, questioning the judgement. To cite a line from the letter:

> The Court, under your leadership, has taken great strides for civil liberties in cases involving affluent urban women (e.g. Mrs. Maneka Gandhi and Mrs. Nandini Satpathy). Must illiterate, labouring, politically mute Mathuras of India be continually condemned to their pre-constitutional Indian fate? (Cited in John 2008, 271)

Seen against the backdrop of these discussions and movements, one can read the film as the story of the betrayal by a man--Rajesh establishes sexual relations with Uma by making false promises, and thus without her informed consent. Yet, the film is far from recognizing it as 'rape'. It is Uma who must prove that she is worthy of Rajesh.

I would contend that the spirited heroines of the 60s (despite the final resolution which re-established the social/domestic order) go missing in the 70s. Gender increasingly plays the function of containing class-caste and urban-rural conflicts. The female protagonists are like ‘Lakshmi’ and ‘Uma’, (literally named after them) the domestic goddesses of Odia upper caste households. The ideal of Odia womanhood becomes more and more entrenched. Sati of *Malajanha*, even though she committed suicide in the end, could nurture an ‘illegitmate’ desire outside of marriage and even migrated to the city with a man not her husband. One would be hard pressed to find such a female character in the popular Odia cinema of the 70s. Even as there is questioning and challenge from the oppressed classes and tribes against the established *brahmin-karan* strongholds in society, mainstream cinema addresses these questions only to re-frame them in the discourse of feminine love, chastity and sacrifice.

In the subsequent chapter, I examine how Odia cinema continues to address certain critical questions emerging within the feminist discourse and the women’s movement and re-articulates them in a more aggressively conservative frame.

Chapter V

Regulating Feminist Questions and Re-fashioning Femininity: The Eighties and Nineties[13]

The seventies are marked by energetic debates, protests and movements around the women's question. The continuing marginalization of women after independence, both socially and economically, comes to fore. As the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1975 so effectively brings out, only a small group of privileged middle class women become the recipients of the benefits of the independent state—in terms of educational advancement and economic independence. However, the majority of women from rural and working class background continue to be economically and socially marginalized. As Neera Desai (1987) has pointed out, 'The continued absence of concern for increasing the earning power of women has given women's economic needs a low priority value'. The state looked at women as recipients of economic development but not as active participants in it.

This chapter looks at the Odia films of the eighties continuing into the nineties that address the feminist debates and challenges to the pervasive culture of rape and violence against women which increasingly gathers momentum during this period. We even catch glimpses of a new kind of woman who does not take such violence for granted but is ready to fight back. But as we shall see, this woman always has a counterpoint in the shape of (a) her own chastity and moral authority as a traditional wife/mother which frames and justifies her transgressions; and/or (b) the moral authority of another woman who is represented as morally superior because of her sacrifice and patience.

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[13] An earlier version of this chapter has been published by me as an article titled 'The Creation of New Odia Woman in Odia Cinema' in *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* (Vol.4, No.11, 2016).

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks at some of the critical questions emerging from the women's movement in the 80s that have an impact on cinema of the time. The second deals with specific films set in these contexts.

Section I

Questions from the Women's Movement

A new moment is inaugurated with the publication of the report of the CSWI entitled *Towards Equality* in 1975, a result of extensive interactions with women across India, bringing out the fact that the formal equality promised in the constitution, remained a distant dream for most women in rural and non-middle class locations. Women were envisaged mostly within the framework of family, as mothers and housewives, but the issue of their political representation was neglected. Looking back at her experience while interacting with women in rural and remote parts of India Veena Mazumdar (2008, 31), the member secretary of the CSWI stated:

> Since modernization has made so little effort to combat either the hierarchy of the Indian social structure or the inequalities inherent or emanating from that structure, the process of sanskritization continued unabated. More concretely, since the message of the Constitution—equality of rights, justice, etc had not reached those who are expected to benefit the

> most from these values, social acceptance of Constitutional prescriptions remain negative.

The social and political vulnerability of women is further foregrounded by the increased growing instances of horrific violence against women—dowry-related deaths, rape, sexual assault and domestic violence. The Mathura case that I have mentioned in the last chapter is an example which brings out the conjoining of gender and social vulnerability. This event became a rallying point for the women's movement which erupted into a protest against the unjust system that placed blame on the victim of rape. Ultimately, it led to an amendment of the rape law in 1983, placing the burden of proving consent on the accused and not on the victim.

As social contradictions became more and more conspicuous, a vigorous women's movement gathered force. It called for a new understanding of 'woman'. Women's groups demanded that the woman needed to be the subject and not the object of development and modernization. Against this backdrop of social ferment and the re-articulation of the women's question, a new woman begins to emerge in cinema towards the end of the seventies in Hindi cinema and also parallelly, as I attempt to demonstrate, in Odia cinema. The anger of the woman gets articulated in several of what comes to be known as women-centric films, especially in Hindi cinema. According to Jyotika Virdi (2003, 160), 'the nation was undergoing a long consciousness-raising process as women were challenging and rewriting discriminatory laws on domestic violence, rape, dowry, and the growing incidence of dowry deaths'. Against this backdrop, a wide range of films portraying women's issues were made. The earlier soft, docile female characters were replaced with the 'new woman' who was traditional as well as modern and negotiated the various issues that had emerged from the women's movement. As Virdi (2003, 164) points out, especially with reference to Hindi cinema, in the 1980s the 'avenging woman' figure became a trend: the 'angry woman' replacing the 'angry man' of the 1970s. She further states:

> Although rape appeared in earlier films it was never at the center of the narrative, and even when it was salient, allusions to its reality were carefully repressed. The rape threat is seized upon and made central in the 1980s, instead of just hovering in the margins. (164)

The 'vamp' of the seventies becomes less visible by the eighties. The heroines are projected as combining of traditional values and western modernity. Virdi (2003, 170) draws attention to a new trend: the female lead was transformed from a childlike innocent woman into a sexually alluring creature in the 80s. Earlier, while there was a certain section of actresses performing the seductive dance numbers, the heroine mostly indulged in romancing the hero, but this period witnessed the heroine performing these 'provocative' dances. The heroine exuded certain sexuality even as she tried to fulfill the role of the traditional 'good woman'. Much of this had to do with changing boundaries of rules governing sexuality: the boundaries of the space 'good' women could occupy expanded slightly (Virdi 2003, 170). Thus a new figure of woman emerged (especially documented with reference to Hindi films but this happened in regional cinema of South India as well) who was traditional as well as modern; who could sacrifice her happiness for the sake of family and also stood for justice.

Though before the eighties, women have been represented as victims of violence, violence was not the central theme of the narration. But, as an effect of the women's movement and the issues it raised one found the emergence of a female figure in mainstream cinema who raised her voice against discrimination. As Virdi states, in the early 1980s, women's groups all over India coalesced for the first time as a distinctive feminist voice and demanded changes in the laws dealing with rape. The film *Insaaf ka Taraazu* (1980) arrived in the context of the historical moment when the infamous Mathura rape and subsequent regressive legal judgements outraged women across the nation (Virdi 2003, 160).

Fashioning the 'new woman'

B. R. Chopra's film *Insaaf ka Taraazu* (1980) is about a female model—independent, sexually bold—one who could not simply be defined by the norm of traditional femininity. She is raped by a rich and powerful fan, an event that wrecks her personal as well as professional life. She takes the perpetrator to the court but loses the legal battle. Years later, her younger sister is raped by the same man as she unwittingly approaches him for a job. This time the female protagonist takes law into her hand and takes revenge by killing him. When the legal system is unable to give justice to the woman, the film portrays her transition into a ferocious fighter who must fight for herself. While clearly impacted by the ripples generated by the Maya Tyagi and Mathura rape cases, the film sensationalizes rape and represents it for a male voyeuristic gaze. Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willeman (1995, 446) write:

> The notorious rape movie followed in the wake of feminist activism in India in the 70s after the Mathura and Maya Tyagi rape cases, the amendment of the Rape Law and the impact of e.g. the Forum against Rape which offered legal assistance to rape victims….The three rape sequences shown in the film, staged with voyeuristic relish, no doubt contributed to its commercial success.

As Gita Viswanath (2002, 43-44) points out even the conservative Hindu Right's construction of womanhood is not entirely based on tradition. It envisages the ideal Indian woman as one who is both modern and traditional. The primacy of a woman's traditional role as wife and mother is reiterated. The Hindutva discourse does not go against women's freedom to pursue educational and professional interests but posits that their 'essential' feminine roles must be maintained.

In the context of the above discussion, one can say that a 'new woman' emerges in the 80s alongside a new kind of patriarchy. At a point when the Hindi film industry increasingly turns its attention to violence against women, Odia cinema also begins to engage with various social issues like dowry, rape and other kinds of oppressive practices imposed on women. More 'women-centric' films are made which project a new kind of femininity. These new female protagonists are strong and bold while keeping intact the old Odia values, and the celebrated Odia upper caste model of *gruhalakshmi*. Set in a distinctively Odia gendered historical context, the films share some of the themes of the Hindi films of the time but are, at the same time, different in their approach and representations. For instance, the rape victim in the film *Para Jhia Ghara Bhangena* never rises to the status of a heroine as in *Insaaf ka Tarazu*, because she breaches the trust of her husband, incidentally the same man who had raped her before marriage. The sanctity of the '*gruhalakshmi*' remains unquestioned.

Below, I look at some of the films of the eighties and the nineties to understand the shifts in the gender role and expectations of that particular period.

Section II

Para Jhia Ghara Bhangena ('Another's daughter does not Break the Home', 1985)

Para Jhia Ghara Bhangena is a film that raises the issues of rape and dowry related harassment within the context of the family. Here *para jhia* (a girl from another family) refers to the daughter-in-law. Sura, a doctor by profession, and Sabitri, an educated woman, are deeply in love and intend to marry. The film begins with Sura writing a letter to his girlfriend about his new job and how much he misses her. He informs his father and step mother, Netramani of his desire to marry Sabitri. However, during the marriage negotiations, Sura's step uncle places the demand of dowry before Sabi's family. This is the moment when the reality of a woman's value in society overshadows the idea of love between the couple. As Sura's uncle puts it, Sabitri's beauty and education are not enough to acquire a groom who is a doctor from a rich and reputed family. Though it is a love marriage, the couple's love is not enough to bridge the class gap and can only be negotiated through dowry. The inability of Sabitri's family to fulfil the expectations of her in-laws puts them in a humiliating position. The visuals capture the helplessness of the family— close ups of the daughter being decorated with all the jewellery, preparing her for marriage alternate with intervening shots of her mother's bare ears and neck. This poignantly alerts us to the impending poverty and economic insecurity that is her fate now.

While the step mother-in-law Netramani is responsible for creating misunderstanding between the couple, there is a backstory to her life which makes her more complex than the sterotypical 'evil mother-in-law'. It turns out her father was a servant in the house of Sura's father, a powerful landlord. One night, in a drunken state, he had raped her. Repentant, later he married her. This would ordinarily be viewed as the landlord's bigheartedness and a recovery of honour for Netramani through the legitimation of marriage. However, in this case, even though Netramani is ready to accept the 'compensation' she never lets go of the anger against the elderly widower who had subjected her to his lust against her consent. She turns into the 'avenging female', a figure which, as I have mentioned before, appears in many Hindi films of the time as well. Displaying a shocking and ruthless side, she mixes poison in the milk that she serves her husband every night, driving him to a slow death without his knowledge. When the landlord eventually comes to know about it, shocked at the knowledge of being poisoned by his own wife, he dies of a heart attack.

At this moment, presenting a stark opposition to the ideal of Odia womanhood discussed earlier, the wife Netramani is shown laughing hysterically at the death of her husband. Netramani, we come to learn, is the victim of rape who had nurtured the spirit of revenge over years. By portraying her as 'mad' and evil, the film deflates her emotions and instead, highlights the irrationality and dangerous sexuality that marks the 'monstrous feminine'. Barbara Creed (1993) has developed the term 'monstrous feminine' in relation to horror films in her *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Challenging the patriarchal view that woman terrifies because she is castrated, Creed argues that woman terrifies because of a fear that she might ‘castrate’ the man. In this sense, by rendering the landlord helpless and finally killing him, Netramani symbolically emasculates him.

Netramani is an extremely unusual, ‘unfeminine’ character—in terms of her rage and thirst for revenge. The film initially appears to radically contest the societal norm according to which a raped woman can be saved through marriage to the perpetrator of rape. But it stops short of making such a political statement and takes a more conservative route through which it explains and appropriates Netramani’s protest. The rapist, the landlord, is never really shown in a bad light. He had committed the act of rape on a night when he was drunk and not in his senses. The act is separated from his fundamental nature which is shown to be compassionate. He is the benevolent patriarch and the provider. Thus, even though Netramani never accepts the violation of her bodily integrity, the film presents her as cruel and devious rather than as spirited and strong and feminist. She never attains the status of the feminist subject. On the other hand, Netramani and her brother become blind and lame dramatically as if as a result of divine retribution and finally realize their ‘sins’. Netramani is punished for harming a ‘generous’ man who had tried to ‘set things right’ by marrying her.

Sura, Netramani’s step son, is shown to be devoted to her. It has the mythological sub-text of Rama’s devotion to his ‘scheming’ step mother, Kaikeyi. He leaves the house without anybody’s knowledge when she tells him that that as per astrological prediction, physical intimacy between him and Sabi can lead to a threat to his father's life. The obedient son is compared to second Rama by his friend Sushant. Just as Rama had to leave Sita, so does Sura leave Sabitri. The reference to the myth reinforces Netramani's image as evil and scheming. It also shows her contempt for familial values—and utter disregard for a husband's love and a son's devotion. It also takes focus away from Sura's abandonment of his wife, and his failure to stand by her within a domestic setup where she faces abuse. Both Netramani and Sabi suffer in the film, but no feminist solidarity is made possible between them. Instead, they are set off against each other as opposites. Sabi is the long-suffering, sacrificing wife while Netramani is the dangerous femme fatale.

Sabitri is pitched against Netramani, the model of Odia womanhood, she serves as a counterpoint to the 'monstrous femininity' of Netramani. Sabi is long suffering and uncomplaining, even when she has to listen to the taunting words of her step mother-in-law about her character and family background.

Sabitri's sacrifice brings her husband back to her life like her namesake, the mythological Sabitri's love and dedication brought back her dead husband from *yamalok* (the land of the dead). Through all her humiliation and misery at the in-laws' house, she patiently waits for her husband who finally comes back to her and recognizes her as the 'ideal' wife and daughter-in-law.

While the economic marginalization of women had emerged as a central issue in the women's movement of the seventies and eighties, Sabitri's father uses the dominant mythology of Sita in Ramayana as the lens through which to explain Sabitri's condition to his son. Though Sita's suffering was endless, she did not get back to her parental home as she had no right on that space after marriage. The very title of the film presents the daughter-in-law as *para jhia* which means somebody else’s daughter. Sabi’s father’s point of view excludes her from the parental home as well. Eventually, the film strongly endorses the societal norm: ‘a girl has no home of her own’. She is always somebody else’s property at her parental home and somebody else’s daughter in the marital home. During the anti-dowry movements of the seventies and after, it had come to light that several women committed suicide to save their families from pauperization due to dowry demands of their marital family. As I have referred to earlier, the film does make an attempt to represent the economic disintegration of a family as a result of the demand for dowry made on them. Sabi's whole family gets scattered, rendering its members homeless. Her mother dies due to starvation and hard work. The struggle of the family portrays how dowry can devastate a family. However, the idealization of Sabitri and the comparison between her and the mythological Sita/Savitri ultimately does not allow the film to strongly connect with the the contemporary discourse of protest, emerging from within the women’s movement. As an ideal Odia woman, she can re-integrate the family, and rejuvenate the community not through protest but through sacrifice.

While Sabitri, the main female protagonist of the film, is represented as conforming to tradition and an epitome of Odia ideal womanhood, as I have pointed out previously Netramani is her Other. But Indrani, the second daughter-in-law of the family, represents another counterpoint. She is not shown to be ‘evil’ like Netramani but she is a modern woman who does not silently accept oppression. After knowing the truth of her marital family, Indrani, dares to leave that house immediately without giving importance to the taunts of the society. In contrast, the elder daughter-in-law Sabi who is the victim of dowry does not take any step against it. The film attributes the differences between the two women to their families with contrasting moral values. While Sabi's father tells her brother that a married daughter has no rights in the parental house, Indrani's father, who is a well-known lawyer in the city, supports his daughter when she returns from the marital home.

So, while Sabi is represented as the ideal Odia woman, and as someone who might appeal to the Odia middle class film-going audience, we may read Indrani as a subtle critique of Sabi's submissiveness. One may read in Indrani's character, a gesture towards a modernity which will empower women to defend themselves against oppressive familial and traditional structures. Dinabandhu, a young social activist of the village who campaigns against dowry is another harbinger of such modernity. Ironically, he is the son of the middle man who had fixed the dowry amount for Sura and Sabi's marriage. Here while the father does not mind ruining a woman's family to get the commission from the dowry, the son presents a complete contrast. He arranges stage shows, dramas creating awareness and propagating the prohibition of dowry. The changing ideology of the younger generation has been projected as a contrast to the regressive ideology of the older generation.

Para Jhia Ghara Bhangena is clearly framed within the social turmoil and protests around issues such as dowry harassment and women's oppression. But even as the film addresses these issues, it resolves them within the overarching structures of Odia family and Odia womanhood.

Bada Bhauja (Elder Sister-in-law, 1985)

Bada Bhauja once again is a film about the central role of a daughter-in-law in keeping a family together. In the context of bride burning and dowry deaths, the reiteration of the importance of family and the instrumentality of the daugter-in-law in maintaining its sanctity emerges as significant.

The film starts with a poor widow struggling hard for livelihood to bring up her four children. She has to give up the younger son for adoption to a relative, but dies of that sorrow. The elder son Deba takes good care of the younger brother Ashok and sister Mami by sacrificing his own happiness. He remains uneducated yet through his struggle educates his siblings. He is the responsible father-like elder brother in the absence of both the parents. When he gets married, his wife, the eldest sister-in-law of the family, becomes the perfect complement to him, taking on the role of the nurturing mother.

The song '*ama ghara eka mandira, seta saraga thu sundara*' (our home is a temple and more beautiful than heaven itself) portrays the ideal of joint family, where the elders sacrifice their happiness for the sake of family and for the younger members, the elders are the living gods. Shades of *Matira Manisha* can be seen. The sacrificing elder brother and the affectionate sister -in-law who takes care of the younger siblings of her husband like a mother are the central characters of the film. The sister-in-law convinces her husband to mortgage the house for securing a job of the younger brother Ashok. She gives up all her ornaments to the younger sister of her husband at the time of the latter's marriage. When Deba gets trapped in a murder case, she does her utmost to prove him innocent. Even when the long lost brother Raja (who was adopted by a relative) meets her as a stranger, she becomes the affectionate and caring sister-in-law to him as well. Raja imbues the vanishing Odia joint family with a moral force, and acts as the one that calibrates the relations between various members.

The younger brother Ashok gets a job as a police inspector for which his family has to bribe the middle man with ten thousand rupees. The middle man taking bribe beneath the statue of Gopabandhu Das who was one of the eminent freedom fighter of Odisha is a symbolic representation of the disintegration of the moral fabric of the society. Gopabandhu Das (1877-1928) is well known as the foremost social reformer, political activist and literary figure of Orissa, entitled as Utkalamani (the Gem of Odisha). He is famed for his commitment to public cause, social service (often at the cost of neglecting his own family) and his incorruptibility. I suggest that the film sets up Gopabandhu as a benevolent patriarchal figure and the present day ills are measured against his stature. It may also be read as a longing for the lost greatness of the Odia past. Against this backdrop, the discrimination against women may be redressed by regeneration of society through reform. Ironically, the regeneration of society/family rests on woman, putting her back in her pre-determined role in the patriarchal familial structure.

The frames of reference of the film (such as Gopabandhu) lead to the re-articulation of modern womanhood, as one that must never lose sight of 'essential', traditional values. This becomes especially clear in the context of Banita, Ashok's wife. Ashok shifts to the city and falls in love with the modern, educated Banita, the only daughter of a senior police officer. When goons try to kidnap Banita from a temple, in the typical manner of a hero, Ashok comes to save her but she also fights with the goons. Clothed in t-shirt and trousers, her clothes are a marker of modernity and western influence which are very different from the outfit of the elder sister-in-law who is always seen in a saree. Banita is represented as very different from the typical Odia woman. After she and Ashok get married, Ashok stays in city with his wife who is modern and does not like the extended family of Ashok back in the village. This ultimately leads a rift between the couple, as she is not ready to take care of his sister-in-law or her own child. He reminds Banita that her identity is only as 'Mrs. Ashok', and cannot be defined by the house or property. Here is a husband reminding the wife that her existence and status in the society depend on her relationship with the husband and not on the material status. Finally, the city girl must go back to village to fulfil the expectations of an ideal daughter-in-law. This is a significant in the context of the women's movement which foregrounds demands for the economic independence and individual identity of women at this point. The film appears to be addressing the questions that emerge from feminist demands and then subverts them by re-emphasizing the priority of the family.

Notably, violence is shifted from family to the archetypal feudal villain in Indian cinema, particularly Odia cinema, the village moneylender Sevak Ram. When a family in the village is unable to repay his loan, he kidnaps and rapes the women of the family. Thus 'woman' becomes an object of exchange. But sexual violence and the objectification of woman are completely and clearly attributed to a feudal villain, thus, establishing the family (such as that of Deba) as a space outside gendered power relationships. Further, rape is posed as a violation of family/male honour rather than as an encroachment upon the bodily integrity of the woman.

When one of the rape victims of Sevak Ram commits suicide by hanging herself, her brother goes mad out of grief. The grief is caused not only by the death of his sister, but by his failure as a man to save the ‘honour’ of his sister. As Agrawal (2012, 258) has discussed, rape is represented not only as a matter of sexual lust, it is an affirmation of women as objects of pleasure and an underlining of the power of men. In a collective context, rape becomes an explicitly political act and in the context of an organized aggression, it becomes a spectacular ritual, a ritual of victory, the defilement of the autonomous symbol of honor of the enemy community.

The lost brother Raja suddenly re-appears with his friends John and Jani who are Christian and Muslim respectively. Their friendship is the symbol of the unity of three religions. In the absence of Deba and Ashok, Raja and his friends assume the roles of the caretakers of this family. During a picnic, the song by Raja and his friends ‘*nua bhauja tame jhia ti sita pari*’ (oh new sister-in-law you are a girl like Sita) compares Banita with Sita. I would like to suggest that the insertion of Raja and his friends from different religious backgrounds into the family lead to an identification of the family with the nation. The woman once again emerges as the symbol/agent of integration. It is notable that the focus shifts from the eldest sister-in-law to Banita in the above mentioned song, and she is re-formed and re-figured as Sita. Banita is thus transformed into the symbol of the new ideal woman, who can nurture as well as defend herself and her family. When Sevak Ram kidnaps the family and ties them up in his godown, there is once again a reference to mythology. We see a painting of Kali behind the two women and an image of Hanuman behind Raja. This is an interesting combining of two different mythologies—that of Ramayana (Raja as Hanuman) and the Kali as the destroyer (the two women who can fight for their family and honour). While the image of Kali indicates the inherent feminine power in women, the Hanuman symbol does not allow us to forget that this power must be tied to the structure of the patriarchal family. As Sachidananda Mohanty (2004) has traced the place of the Shakti metaphor in the way talented and accomplished women of Odisha articulated their position. For early literary women of the 20th century, the desire to strive against societal odds for literary creativity and participation in public space needed to be balanced by referencing superior role models and icons such as Shakti for legitimacy (Mohanty 2004, 2443). Hence the principle of Shakti, while empowering was also a burden. *Bada Bhouja* borrows from this early formulation of femininity in Odisha in the way it uses the Kali metaphor, but the real and complex negotiations and struggle of the early literary women is entirely missing in this narrative.

Shankha Sindura ('Conch shell Bangles-Vermilion', 1988)

Shankha Sindura reiterates the dominant pattern witnessed in the Odia cinema of the eighties, through its reaffirmation of the centrality of the woman's place in family. The very title refers to the sacred symbols of the married Odia woman, the conch shell bangles and vermilion.

The film begins with a view of the big house that belongs to the former landlord Ray Bahadur Birendra Pattnaik, who has lost all his property in his struggle to maintain the family legacy. Ignorant of the family's financial crisis, the daughter, Shobha demands a car as she feels ashamed to travel by rickshaw. As the only daughter of a once-rich landlord she feels she must meet the expectations of a high class lifestyle. Purnachandra, a relative of his father comments that whether the daughter gets educated or drives a car, at the end she has to go to the kitchen. The son of the family, Sriram is in love with Geeta, a middle class girl. In a typical situation, Geeta begins to respond to his love after he saves her from some goons. Here we can see that Shobha's frivolity leads the audience to identify with Purnachandra's position. The emancipation of women, a serious demand emerging from feminist organizations and movements, gets diluted through the non-seriousness of Shobha's character. However, the film attempts to address how, in a society that subscribes to the practice of dowry, marriage can only be a ritual of exchange and individual emotions have no place.

The Pattnaik family arranges Sriram's marriage first, so that they can conduct the daughter's marriage with the dowry money they get from the daughter-in-law's family. The film represents daughters as objects for barter, to be exchanged for the continuation of the status of the family.

We can clearly see that it is Lakshmi, the new daughter-in-law who must pay the price for Sriram's obedience to his parents. Her husband ignores her and refuses to have any conjugal relations with her.

The fantasy song sequence, '*tume hi swarga mora, tume debata mora*' (you are my heaven, you are my deity), despite its traditional register of devotion towards a husband, also brings out Lakshmi's longing and repressed sexuality. The fantasy of physical intimacy with her husband is symbolized through the union of two flowers—a set convention in Indian popular cinema that represents sexual consummation. Such visual representations of desire create slippages in the over narrative about the sacrificing daughter-in-law who maintains her duty as a wife and daughter-in-law though her marriage is never consummated. While the conventional representation of the ideal long suffering woman takes centre stage, there is a sub-text of desire and sexuality that spills out at different moments.

The mother-in-law passes on the responsibility of the household to Lakshmi, the daughter-in-law, after extracting the promise that she should not risk the family name and fame at any cost. Even as she is installed as the ‘moral centre of the household’ by this act, her husband Sriram divorces her as he is unable to accept her as wife. He admits that circumstances had compelled him to marry her but it would be better to separate and lead their lives in their own ways. The narrative at this point opens up several possibilities that can be taken further. One, it is a clear case of desertion by a husband which calls for legal remedy that is the wife’s right. Two, it offers Lakshmi the scope to take up Sriram’s desertion as an opportunity for her as a woman, now free to build a new life, where she could seek economic and emotional independence, and perhaps a fulfilment of repressed physical desires. But, predictably, she chooses to act within the pre-determined moral script available to an upper caste Odia woman. Lakshmi bypasses the available feminist choices by refusing to consider a life beyond marriage. She tells Sriram that for a Hindu woman, marriage is a sacred bond and her husband remains her god even after life. Thus, a signature on the divorce paper does not end the marriage for her. With this routine dialogue reiterating the unshakable status of *pati parameshwar*, the film preempts the possibilities for contestation, offered through feminist or Constitutional frames. Lakshmi remains true to her name. As I have discussed earlier, Lakshmi is the female deity worshipped in the private spaces of Odia upper caste homes. It is believed that she brings prosperity to the inner space. We have seen by now that several Odia films have heroines named as Lakshmi.

When Lakshmi’s father comes to take her home, she turns him back saying that after marriage the girl has no right to the parental house. Her in-laws are now like gods to her, and a woman’s respect increases only when she stays in the marital house and decreases if she stays with the parents. Lakshmi’s words are fundamentally opposed to the struggles of women against familial and societal structures through the 70s and 80s as sites of oppression, that rob them of their freedom and individuality. It had emerged in the women’s movement that women suffering from domestic violence and neglect could not return to their natal families due to social norms. However, in this film, the woman of her own accord turns back to her father—thus, ironically exercising ‘choice’—one that endorses the patriarchal code of conduct. When she and her marital family lose their house because they are unable to repay a loan, the son does not care about the plight of his parents. It is Lakshmi who takes up a job for the upkeep of the family. But her father-in-law can only look at it as an affront to his role as the patriarch and takes up the job of a coolie simply because he cannot bear the thought of the daughter-in-law providing for the family. This could have been represented as an act of support the daughter-in-law and as the father-in-law working alongside her for the survival of the family. Instead, the film highlights the centrality of the idea of male/family honour. Consequently, the woman’s capability, skills, struggles and economic contribution to the family are only weighed in terms of whether these qualities conform to familial honour or not.

Let us return to the desire of Lakshmi herself, which is throughout repressed or sublimated, only visible in the fantasy moments of a song. I would argue that the film labours to ‘manage’ female desire and re-orient it into a traditional structure where she is only seen as a mother or wife or daughter-in-law. The possibility of female desire crops up again when Lakshmi encounters Vijay, her boss who ‘saves’ her from the lustful overtures of the managing director. He is clearly attracted to her and ultimately proposes marriage. But Lakshmi rejects his proposal, stating that though she has no relationship with her husband, he is still alive and she will be his wife until her last breath. But she continues to be his friend, accepting him as a well wisher who is always there at the time of need. A feminist reading may read beyond this friendship, allowing us to think of Lakshmi as a woman with normal sexual desires, not as de-sexualized, as the overt narrative of the film presents her to be.

Geeta, Ashok’s second wife, is Lakshmi’s counterpoint. She is the modern woman who can be the perfect counterpart of her husband, but not a ‘good’ daughter or daughter-in-law. She must eventually die, paving the way for the reunion between Ashok and Lakshmi. Lakshmi’s sufferings are rewarded only by winning back the affections of a wayward husband who had abandoned her. As one can clearly see the film strains against the political and social questions raised in women’s movements and struggles. On the one hand, it endorses the subservience of Lakshmi and on the other, frames Geeta’s search for a home outside the norms and restrictions of the joint family as self-centered and not acceptable. The crisis of the family can only be resolved through her death. Thus, the film sets up one woman against another, once again negating the possibility of feminist solidarity.

Thili Jhia Heli Bohu (*‘I was a daughter and became a daughter-in-law’, 1988*)

Thili Jhia Heli Bohu continues the trend of films that are centered around a woman’s sacrifice for familial well-being. The female lead Ganga is ill-treated by her step mother. Yet, she does all the housework, never showing any resentment. She has no prospects of getting married due to the high dowry demands put forth by prospective bridegrooms. But she falls in love with Bharat, a highly educated and well-employed young man. Bharat too loves her and wants to marry her. But a family crisis forces Ganga to forsake all chance of happiness and get married to an elderly widower, named Sagar, in order to save her family from dishonour. Sagar is a drunkard, a gambler and morally depraved. Life is nothing but full of misery for Ganga and yet she reiterates that her husband is her 'god'. Her old lover Bharat tries to help her escape but she would not leave her husband, despite his house being a hell for her. There are moments when her desire for Bharat becomes manifest through her gaze, like when she ties a bandage to his injured hand. Despite its normative plot of ideal femininity, and the *dharma* of the married woman, such slippages in the film indicate a trasgressive desire.

Just like the predecessors of Ganga, within this popular genre of films in the eighties and nineties, the very naming of the heroine signifies purity. This purity of the heroine is constituted through an overwhelming subservience to the elders, to husband and to family in general. At the same time, such subservience serves the purpose of negating and erasing the activism of women's/feminist groups within the civil society and the protests for women's rights.

In fact, the strong woman is ridiculed in the scenes of comic relief, showing the interactions of the couple Krishnapriya and Radhakanta. Krishnapriya is very dominating and forces her husband to do all house work. Radhakanta is represented as effeminate. Significantly, it is only when he becomes masculine and aggressive, Krishnapriya 'learns her place' and turns into the obedient wife. The message coincides with the discourse of

Manusmriti, a husband must be authoritative and masculine in order to control his wife and prevent her from going astray (Chakravarti 1995). Similarly, when a man is morally corrupt or treats his wife unfairly, she must not turn to 'protest' but must transform him through her patience and devotion.

***Uddandi Sita:* ('Daredevil Sita', 1992)**

This film tells the story of Sita, a village girl who lives according to her own will without caring for societal norms. While the heroine is named—like the heroines of most films discussed before—after an icon of virtue from Hindu mythology, the film sets up a contradiction between the name and her character. She is a worshipper of the goddess Durga, considered a militant goddess in Hindu anthology—the destroyer of evil. The opening scene focuses on the face of Sita, wearing a red saree, creating an illusion of her as Durga. Later on, a scene from Ramayana is inserted into the film during a play, depicting a dialogue between Ravana and Sita. While Ravana calls Sita week, she reminds him that she is not the same Sita from Ramayana. She would not accept the injustices inflicted by society. Obviously, the reference is to the contemporary Sita, the heroine of the film, who is represented as different from her mythological namesake. She crosses the boundaries of the modest, 'proper' Odia womanhood through her aggressive and daring behaviour and even takes lead in proposing marriage to a simple village youth, Raju. She litrally traps him into marriage, obviously transgressing the lines drawn for a 'good girl'. Sita, although a woman, takes leadership in expressing and fulfilling her desire.

The film does draw upon the discontent against the feudal classes manifest in the upsurge of peasants in the countryside. Ray Saheb is the prototypical landlord who controls and exploits the villagers. The villagers overthrow the landlord and choose the upright Raju as their leader. An ex-army man, disabled during service, is his strong supporter. Thus, the film turns a potential people's revolt into a narrative of nationalism. In fact, when the army man is killed because he raises his voice against the landlord, Raju's son Bharat is seen wearing the khaki shirt of 'army uncle', thus symbolically taking over his responsibility to protect the nation. The film represents the colour khaki as representative of state/nation and not the colour of revolution (khaki, also being the colour of the clothes worn by naxalites and revolutionaries and those who rebelled against state power). The narrative presents the villages and the state (represented by the army man) as united against an evil, stereotypical villain, thus the structural power relationships of the village and the collusion between state and feudal classes remain unaddressed.

The film represents the female protagonist as strong but in such a way that her femininity, while unconventional, is tied to a greater moral cause. Her husband is murdered by the landlord's goons. When she begs for her husband's life, he tries to rape her although she escapes with the help of his wife. Once again, the film falls back on the much drawn upon theme of *Mother India* (1957) where a widowed or abandoned woman's chastity is of supreme moral significance.

After Raju's death, Sita vows revenge. She does not wipe her *sindoor* or wear a white sari, as prescribed for a widow. She continues to wear a red saree and all the symbols of a married woman. She resembles the deity Durga, whom she worships. She also pretends to give in to the landlord's lust, but eventually kills him through deception, thus avenging the death of her husband.

Sita is clearly ‘unfeminine’ in several ways—she is wilful, bold and sometimes ‘unethical’—venturing into the male domain of power and the outside world. She breaks the established norms that bind a married woman. She adopts the tools of manipulation and revenge that are usually strictly reserved for men. She is Sita and yet she is called ‘*uddandi*’ which refers to a wayward, devil-may-care girl who lives according to her own will and wish. The film combines the myths of Sita and Durga to legitimize her character. Ultimately her deviations are acceptable because they are committed in pure devotion towards her husband. When at the end, the police come to interrogate her on suspicion of the landlord’s murder, the entire village including the wife of landlord stand with her. The *uddandi Sita* is an ‘avenging female’ so popular in the 90s cinema yet she also emerges as the *mother india* of her village. Her chastity and moral authority legitimate her transgressions into the ‘masculine’ domain. We can clearly see the contrast between her and Netramani from *Para Jhia Ghara Bhangena*—both of them are unconventional and resort to violence and manipulation. But while one is idealized due to her devotion to her husband, the other is demonized for having betrayed the trust of the husband, irrespective of the fact that he had exercised brutal power over her body without her consent.

Kapala Likhana (The Writing on the Forehead, 1993)

Kapala Likhana demonstrates that the trope of the woman as the preserver of family and its values, continues well into the nineties in Odisha. It is about two brothers, Biju and Raju and their wives, Shanti and Gita respectively. The elder sister-in-law had brought up Raju as her own son, never allowing him to feel the loss of his mother. However destiny takes an unforeseen turn with the coming of Gita into the family. When Gita becomes pregnant, by a strange coincidence, the elder sister-in-law Shanti also becomes pregnant at the same time, after ten years of marriage.

However, at the time of delivery, Gita gives birth to a son while Shanti's child is born dead. Gita's husband Raju requests her to give up their new-born baby to Shanti as she might lose her mental balance if she learnt about the tragic loss of her child. So, in an extraordinary act of sacrifice, the younger daughter-in-law gives up her son to Gita and pretends that it is she who gave birth to a stillborn child. The narrative from then on is about the many travails of Gita. Shanti's relatives do not even allow her to touch the baby. She is branded as 'barren' —the ultimate and vicious censure of a married childless Odia woman by the society.

But Gita and Raju choose to remain silent, so that the elder couple, the brother and sister-in-law would not get hurt. Finally, after Gita is subjected to untold suffering and holds her maternal instinct in check, it comes out that the baby is actually Gita's son. The film ends with the elder sister-in-law giving back the child to Gita saying that Raju is her actual son and she does not need another. The family equilibrium is restored and Gita is rewarded for her suffering, patience and virtue.

Once again, we can see the valorization of the joint family and the bonding among its members. The melodramatic representation of relationships and righteous suffering makes invisible a social and political issue: women without children are considered incomplete and inauspicious, branded with the stigma of barrenness. This is so because they are denied any identity outside of marriage and motherhood. It is the married and mother status that bestow the title '*sumangali*' upon a woman, especially in a dominant

Odia context. Through the glorification of the sacrifice of woman to keep the family intact, the film does not allow any political engagement with the question of 'barrenness' which is looked upon as a state of inauspiciousness in Odia upper caste patriarchal society. Instead, it once again sets up one woman against another—the mother position of one of them becomes a negation of the selfhood of the other. Nivedita Menon (2012) contests the idea of biological mothering as the only kind of mothering and argues for an expanded notion of mothering that includes social mothering, non-heterosexual mothering and so on. Clearly, *Kapala Likhana*, does not draw from this alternative strand available in the feminist discourse.

In this chapter, we have seen how some of the most critical issues emerging from the feminist movement—such as women's right to their bodies and their continuing struggles against sexual violence in patriarchal societies—get re-articulated in more conservative frames in Odia cinema of the 80s and 90s. The upper caste Odia family continues to be an unquestioned space, and a woman's transgressions (in terms of dress, demeanour or resistance of any kind) can only be justified as long as her devotion to this space is complete, and when her actions have the ultimate goal of protecting and nurturing this space. It is interesting to see how a new, strong and contesting femininity begins to emerge—in the shape of Netramani or Uddandi Sita—but then is violently regulated and contained by the narrative. It is marked either as deviant or or as an extension of the mothering, nurturing self of the woman. The core of Odia womanhood remains uncontested and is in fact aggressively endorsed and legitimated. In the next chapter, I look at the new trend of remakes emerging in the 2000s. This is a trend that appears to challenge and disrupt the notion of the authentic Odia family/identity and the gender relations that uphold and maintain it. I attempt an initial, tentative analysis of this trend as a sociological phenoment. This chapter is also a conclusion to this dissertation.

Chapter VI

Conclusion: From ‘Authentic’ Odia identity to the ‘Remake Era’

The mainstream cinema of Odisha, until the 90s, is engaged in legitimating the moral and cultural hegemony of the middle class and upper caste Odia identity. As we have seen, Odia cinema sees many shifts since the 60s. The strong reformist tendency of the 60s is overtaken by the felt need to address social and political challenges to the middle class in the 70s and early 80s in order to re-consolidate its position. During this period, especially in the 80s, an Odia identity is re-asserted in cinema through recurring representations of the Odia ‘ideal woman’ and her conduct and steadfastness in the face of adversity, and her role in keeping the patriarchal family together. In the preceding chapters we saw that even the title of each film reflects the purity and familial location/stature of the female protagonists. She is frequently named Lakshmi (reminiscent of the Odia ideal of *Gruhalakshmi*) or Uma, goddesses who are icons of domestic prosperity and devotion to the husband. The meaning of the woman is derived from the family in these films and in turn, the sanctity of the family rests on her.

In the 90s, we catch a glimpse of the “modern” woman who may have an identity of her own and a sense of independence. However, her potential/resistance is ultimately contained in the familial structure or she is punished for her transgressions (like Netramani). Most of the films upto the 90s reassert the authority of the Odia patriarchal joint family. It is impossible to find a romance or marriage that is not sanctioned within the system.

Hence, the shift that happens in Odia cinema in the early 2000s is both striking and startling. This chapter briefly indicates the emergent trends following the 90s. It is also the conclusion to this thesis. I suggest that with the beginning of the 2000s, the Odia extended family as a sacrosanct unit becomes less and less visible. Its popularity is taken up by what is widely known as the 'remake film'. The scope of this thesis and the constraint of time did not allow me to make any in-depth study of this trend as a sociological phenomenon. However, I carried out a small pilot study aimed at getting certain initial impressions of the audience profile. The time period of this study is 2013. Most of the respondents are of the age group between 18 and 25. I decided on this age group since I got an impression that the audience of the popular remake cinema is mostly from the younger generation.

In this chapter I wish to point out certain contemporary trends in Odia cinema (most importantly, the remake cinema) and the accompanying lamentations of the loss of an Odia essence by many older film-makers and actors and film critics. I do not have enough data to historically explain the new trends but can only point towards a few possible factors and reasons. In order to do so, I mainly rely on certain newspaper articles, comments of established film critics of Odisha and my own small pilot study mentioned above. I have divided the chapter into two sections. The first section attempts to locate the more recent 'remake era' in contemporary social and cultural contexts of Odisha. The second is a summation of and conclusion to the entire thesis.

Section I

The remake era is very often seen as corruption of Odia literature and culture and nothing but imitation and the death of creativity. Shyamhari Chakra (2013, 70), writing about the films made during 90s and beyond, calls this trend ‘quantity sans quality’:

> The decade broke records with the release of 113 films. However, it was also the decade of optimum degeneration in terms of originality and quality. Frame-to-frame copies of Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Bengali films became the order of the day and as a result the audiences of Odia films turned their back on the movies. Similarly, excessive dependence on non-Odia actors and singers were the failings of the decade.

Chakra (2013, 71) believes that there is not much change in the first decade of 2000s. Although a large number of films are released during this period, he feels there is hardly any ‘Odia’ quality in them:

> There is very little to rejoice over in terms of merit, authenticity and creativity. With easy money flowing into the industry, filmmaking has been the fun for a number of producers who are hardly aware of the art and craft of cinema. As a result, more and more poor, mediocre films are being made and Odia film has miserably failed to bring back to the theaters its own Odia audience, who prefer to watch Hindi movies than poor imitations of such films in Odia. The titles of some of the films made during the period are evidence of how Odia films today are barely Odia: *I Love You, Barsa—My Darling, Premi Number One, Wrong Num-*

ber, Babu I Love You, Thank You Bhagaban, and Mnu Tate Love Karuchhi are just a few examples.

It is interesting to note that Chakra refers to an ‘Odianess’, clearly a quality which he feels was part of earlier films but now goes missing. In this chapter, instead of concentrating on ‘quality’, I hope to explore the phenomenon of the ‘remake’ and how it poses a challenge to authentic Odia culture.

In the 2000s, the male lead takes up the screen space, wooing the heroine in frothy, light romances. One does not anymore find female protagonists that were central to the films of an earlier era. Film critic Bibhuti Mishra in a 2002 article in Times of India writes that the newly released Odia film titled *Naribi Pindhi Pare Rakta Sindura* (2002) which is a remake of the superhit Hindi film *Khoon Bhari Maang* (1988) where Rekha played the avenging female is much diluted. The villain takes up much of the screen space and heroine of the remake, Rachna, has very little of Rekha’s screen presence or power. As he puts it:

> It is said the greatest tribute to an artiste is paid by his imitators. But one wonders how Rakesh Roshan would take this terrible tribute from Hara Patnaik [the producer]. Rachna, playing the role of Rekha, is distinctly ill at ease as the avenging fury, crying out for the enemy’s blood. (Mishra, 2002)

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the ‘avenging female’ in Odia cinema has always been a weak version of its counterpart/inspiration in Hindi cinema, constructed as someone who is never allowed to transgress limits of ‘Odia femininity’ in any manner that poses a real threat. However, what Mishra (2002) probably points out is that *Naribi Pindhi Pare Rakta Sindura* did not even have the earlier investment in Odia cultural identity or Odia femininity, and thus flopped miserably. Increasingly, from now on, Odia directors would turn to lighter and more youth-oriented remakes.

If we give a close look to the films released after 2000, we can see a visible change in representing gender relations as well, reflected in the body, clothes, behaviour etc. The bulk of films are remakes of south Indian films especially Telugu films. Remaking is not a new concept in the film industry. It has existed in Hollywood and Bollywood as well. As Kishore Valicha (1988, 39) has pointed out Hindi films have routinely borrowed from Hollywood cinema. But it reworks what it borrows to suit Indian film conventions, tailoring it to convey typically Indian preoccupations. In the case of Odia films, many of the films appear to be the exact copy of the original Telugu films. Though most of the directors deny this allegation, some agree that they do it on public demand. Popular directors like Hara Patnaik have expressed the opinion that the remake era has been arrived to cater to changing audience expectations and tastes:

> It is true that most of the films today are indeed remakes of south Indian hits or Bollywood blockbusters. But in an industry like ours, where producers are not easy to find, we have to consider the profitability of the story. When we know that a particular story has a strong appeal among viewers across the country and even our state, the production is assured that the risk factor in remaking the project in Odia is low. Despite the language barrier, Telugu and Tamil films are widely popular in Odisha. (Panda, 2012)

The fact remains that these remakes became extremely popular in Odisha from the 90s onwards, but more so in the 2000s. Most of the Odia films of the 2000s are scene by scene copies of Telugu films and are huge box office success. This encourages the film makers to invest in Telugu remakes as it guarantees profit. Ashok Palit (2012), a renowned Odia film critic, expresses the opinion in an article 'Remake mania in Odia cinema' that these kinds of films target the rural audience and most of the urban population do not like to watch Odia films because of the lack of originality.

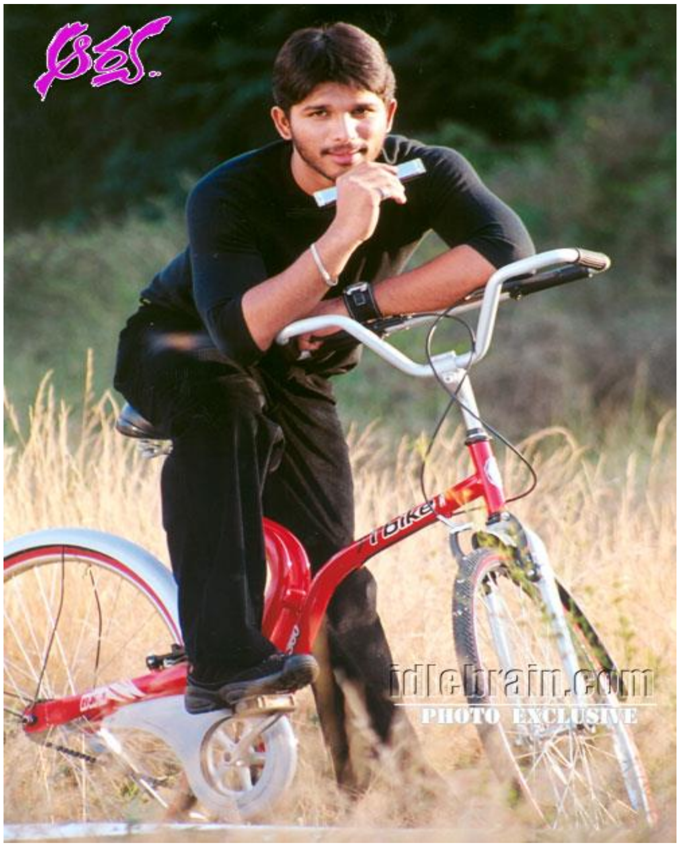
Thus, we can see that the 'refined'Odia middle class—generally of an older generation—distances itself from the remake phenomenon, by associating it with rural, uneducated masses. The renowned actor and director Sarat Pujari (who acted in the celebrated *Matira Manisha* of the 60s and also occupied the position of the President of Odisha Sangeet Natak Academi) reveals the same attitude:

> There is nothing innovative or creative in just copying a theme or scene from another film and inserting it in an Odia film. There is a lot in the culture, values, ethos and lifestyle of our state that can be explored by today's filmmakers….We did not give any award for screenplay for 2010 since most of the nominations were remakes. (Panda, 2012)

Journalist Surya Deo brings out the economic dimension by pointing out that the trend of remaking in Odia films started after the 1970s when Andhra Pradesh government announced subsidy to all the film makers irrespective of language. Some of the Telugu film makers invested in Odia films as well.

If we step out of the narrative of degradation/deterioration through which remake films are seen, we begin to discover certain new dimensions. These films introduce a new sensibility—in terms of cultural ethos, dressing style, dialogues, fight sequence, romance and so on. Significantly, a more patient, sacrificing hero sometimes replaces the sacrificing heroine.

As I have mentioned before, I have not been able to substantially engage with the emergent trend of remake as a sociological and cultural phenomenon. However, I have made an initial attempt to understand why so many Odia films were remakes of hit Telugu films from the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. Some examples are: *I Love You* (2004), remake of *Nuvvu Vastavanni* (2000), *Pagala Premi* (2007), remake of *Arya* (2004), *Mate Anidela Lakhye Phaguna* (2008), remake of *Okkadu* (2003), *Dream Girl* (2009), remake of *Bommarillu* (2006), *Balunga Toka* (2011), remake of *7G Rainbow Colony* (2004), *Love Station* (2016), remake of *Venkatadri Express* (2013). Most of these films are youth-centric and move away from the heavy, melodramatic family dramas of the earlier period. *Arya*, a blockbuster in Telugu, was considered to be a very new kind of college romance, introducing the patient but passionate hero, Arya, who was willing to wait and ultimately even sacrifice his feelings because the girl he loved was in love with another man. The male contest over a woman which has been the staple of Indian cinema, takes an interesting turn where the hero does not force but convinces the woman that he is the one for her. It is like a psychological victory though manipulating her emotions. Branded clothes, beautiful locales, youthful campuses add to the aura of the film. In an earlier era of Telugu/South Indian cinema, the hero/lover looked older and ruggedly masculine. But Allu Arjun, the hero of *Arya* is the yuppie, personifying a youth icon in every sense. He represents a soft, urban masculinity through his dancing skills and youthful physique. Sabyasachi Mishra playing the role of the hero in the Odia remake closely resembled Allu Arjun physically, and adopted the latter's mannerisms and style. The following images bring out the resemblance.



(Allu Arjun in Telugu film *Arya*, 2004. Picture Courtesy: orissadiary.com)

(Sabyasachi in *Pagala Premi*, Hara Patnaik, 2007. Picture Courtesy: orissadiary.com)

Similarly, the Telugu *Bommarillu* (‘House of Dolls’, 2006) had Genelia and Siddharth, both popular stars among the young audience. Genelia acted as the young, happy-go-lucky and playful girl who wins over the rich but rigid father of her boyfriend and brings happiness and freedom to his suppressed family. The film went to break all records, making her a household name. Notably, Siddharth, an already established actor, provided the perfect balance to Genelia in terms of his natural acting, freshness and projection of an urban, soft masculinity (once again unlike the typical rugged hero of Telugu/Indian cinema). Significantly, once again Sabyasachi Mishra plays the hero in the remake of *Bommarillu,* titled *Dream Girl* (2009). He is paired with Priya Choudhury, who is from an urban, middle class background in real life and exudes the same modern, carefree aura of Genelia. She embodies a femininity that is not seen in the Odia cinema of an earlier era, until the 2000s. She can easily pass off as a college-going girl from any of the cosmopolitan cities in India. In this sense, there is no distinct marker of ‘Odia womanhood’ on her body. The same can be said of most of the heroines of the remake films. As a biographical note on Priya states:

> A perfect combination of beauty and talent, her mission in life is to be a news-reader in NDTV and open a play school. Daughter of a state government officer, Priya made an entry into the Ollywood by bagging the lead role in the super hit Oriya Cinema Dream Girl….She has also anchored programmes in All India Radio. Negotiation is going on for a bilingual (Bengali-Oriya) feature film, said the 20-year-old actress. Priya gives all credit for success to her parents who gave great support in pursuing her interest. She exudes confidence that she would one day definitely make it big in the world of Oriya Cinema. ('Priya Chowdhury Ollywood Actress', accessed June 2018, odiainfo.in, http://www.odiainfo.in/2016/04/priya-choudhury-ollywood-actress-full.html)

PRIYA
Choudhury
CONCEPT II STYLE AND
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
SHAIKH AZHAR ALI
OLLYWOOD ACTRESS
PRIYA CHOUDHURY

(Priya Choudhury, Picture Courtesy: facebook.com)

It is important to understand this shift in representing woman and gender relations. The female protagonist is no longer the moral centre of the film. She is shown to have desire, sometimes for more than one man, as in *Pagala Premi*. She is not always respectful of authority and self-effacing, as shown in *Dream Girl*. Does it mean that the class-caste hierarchies that were built around the Odia upper caste woman no longer exist? Does this mark the beginning of a more liberated and individualist notion of femininity? Can we think of the remakes as indicating deeper cultural shifts and not simply in terms of 'fall in standards'? Hopefully, these questions can be taken up by future researchers in more substantial ways. However, I would like to bring in some tentative insights that emerged through my pilot study in 2013.

Through this field study, I have made an attempt to know how the above-mentioned Telugu films address Odia audience's aspirations in spite socio-cultural differences. I spoke to fifty-three respondents between the age group of 18 to 25 from two of the major technical institutions of the state, located in Bhubaneswar. One is Siksha O Anusandhana (SOA) University having both engineering and management studies and the other is the Silicon Institute of Engineering. I have chosen these two universities as they are two of the well-known technical institutions of the state. Below I discuss my study and interviews around different indices such as gender, age group etc. I also provide tables based on these indices.

Gender

I suggest that gender of the audience plays a vital role in influencing the choice of film-viewing. Socialization plays a great role in shaping behaviour as well as audience expectation. It is important to study gendered practices of film viewing, because gender roles have changed over a period of time in Odisha. While during an earlier period, not many girls were encouraged to pursue career-oriented technical and engineering courses, now there are quite a number of girl students (largely from middle class background) seen in the technical education campuses. The possible reason behind it is interesting. This can be linked with the parental expectation that this will enhance not only the professional but marital prospects of their daughters.

As the state does not offer a range of job opportunities to the students of technical or professional courses, many men and women from the younger generations migrate to other big cities of India in search of jobs after finishing their studies. At the time of seeking marriage alliance the male professionals expect their life partners to be professionally qualified and smart to fit into cosmopolitan settings and also contribute to family income, in keeping with their aspirations for better living standards. I got a sense from the responses that parents feel that education in a technical field such as computers or engineering will not only ensure a better future but also guarantee qualified bridegroom for their daughters.

Table 1- Distribution of the respondents on the basis of gender

Gender	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	27	50.9
Female	26	49.1
Total	53	100

The respondents constituted a heterogeneous category from which 50.9% is male and 49.1% is female which is almost equal. To understand why Telugu films have a larger audience in Odisha we have to take both the genders into consideration.

Age group

Age group is also an important factor to understand the choices of films made by the audiences. I found that the remakes were popular among the younger people, especially college-going audience. Unlike the older generation, they did not feel anxious about a vanishing ‘Odia’ culture. They were drawn to light romances and action films that became so popular among Telugu cinema audiences from the late 90s.

Table 2- Distribution of respondents on the basis of age

Age group	**Number of respondents**	**Percentage from total number of respondents**
15 to 20 yrs.	21	39.6 %
20 to 25 yrs.	29	54.8 %
Above 25	3	5.6 %
Total	53	100%

Genre

Five genres were taken into account to understand whether gender influenced genre-based viewing choices. Genre is an important criterion for watching films. I explored genre-based choices because I felt that the younger generation watched movies of genres that they could identify with and enjoy.

Table 3- Distribution of the respondents according to the film's genre

Genre of the films	**Male**	**Percentage from the total 27 male**	**Female**	**Percentage from the total 26 female**
Thriller	24	88.8%	15	57.6 %
Comedy	22	81.4%	17	65.3
Drama	13	48.1	20	76.9
Action	26	96.3%	19	73.07%
Romance	25	92.5%	21	80.7%

Table 3 reveals that, most of the boys among the respondents (about 96.3% of the total number of male respondents) like to watch action films followed by romance, thriller, comedy and then drama. On the other hand, most of the girls (80.7% of female respondents) like romantic films, followed by drama, action, comedy and thriller.

Language

Language appeared to be a major determinant in influencing the choice of the respondents. As the emerging engineering colleges in Odisha draw a huge number of students from outside the state, people from different linguistic backgrounds stay in hostels together and intermingle. I found that while watching films together, they often chose films of common interest or films that were accessible to and could be enjoyed by students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Table 4- Distribution of the respondents according to the language of the film

Language	Male	% from the total 27 male	Female	% from the total 26 female
Odia	6	22 %	4	15.3%
Hindi	27	100 %	23	88.4 %
English	25	92.59 %	21	80.7 %
Telugu	27	100 %	21	80.7 %
Tamil	17	62.9 %	13	50 %

All boys, 100% of the respondents, watched Telugu films. This was followed by the choice of Hindi, English, Tamil and Odia films respectively. Most girls, consisting of 88.4 % of the female respondents, liked to watch Hindi films followed by Telugu and English films respectively. I found that the trend of watching Odia films was very low among respondents of both the genders.

I would guess that these viewing choices of young people, who preferred Telugu films to Odia films, would have encouraged the film-makers to produce remakes of Telugu films. As I have referred to earlier, in the 2000s, one notes a growing trend of making youth-centric popular romances in Telugu cinema. Clearly, the respondents liked the trend. Even though veteran Odia film personalities like Sarat Pujari and film journalists like Surya Deo complain about falling standards and loss of Odia identity, the market needs are determined by the preferences of the younger generation, attracted to more cosmopolitan and westernized locales, styles, dances, music and bodies. For instance, the song 'Feel my love....' in *Pagala Premi* is a copy of the extremely popular song—'Feel my love....'—from Arya. Both the songs pulsate with catchy tunes and music, and are picturized against a backdrop of spaces/objects associated with an urban, young crowd, for instance: mouth organ, branded bikes, trendy jackets, college campuses, beaches and so on. It is easy to imagine why such visuals and stories would attract young people studying in technical institutions, mingling with other young people from different cities from outside Odisha and also looking forward to a professional future outside and often abroad. With the growth of job opportunities in multinational companies (popularly known as MNCs), several students aspire to working 'onsite' abroad for long stretches. Through friends and relatives already there, they are exposed to a global lifestyle. The youth-centric South Indian films as well as the well-made Odia remakes of these films connect with such cosmopolitan dreams of young people who rarely have plans to stay anchored to the joint Odia family celebrated in earlier cinema. Obviously, even their families aspire that their children would be placed in big MNCs, possibly abroad. In this scene of changing aspirations, consumptions and expanding professional boundaries, it is only inevitable that the earlier notion of Odia identity loses its stronghold.

Sources accessed to watch cinema

The respondents depended on different sources to watch films. While some people liked to watch films in theatre; some found it is easy to access films on TV. Depending on Internet availability some watched films online as well. Four major sources have been noted in this study.

Table 5- distribution of the respondents on the basis of how they watch films

Source of watching films	**Male**	**% from the total 27 male respondents**	**Female**	**% from the total 26 female respondents**
Theatre	27	100	26	100
Internet	27	100	26	100
Cable TV	25	92.5	21	80.7
DVD	21	77.7	15	57.6

In the table 5, it is observed that all the boys and girls in this study visited theatres to watch films and also accessed films through Internet. 92.5% of boys watched films through cable TV and 77.7% watched through DVD, while in case of girls, the proportion was 80.7% and 57.6% respectively. When I conducted the study, due to the increasing availability and advancement of technology, films had become easily available on the Internet and cable TV. With the free internet connections available to the students in the premises of technical institutes, the respondents found it easy to access and download Telugu films that were available online. Continuous projection of the dubbed South Indian films in different national channels on TV also made those accessible, and generated interest among non-Telugu audience.

Table 6- distribution of the respondents on the basis of their perception towards Odia films

Perception towards Odia films	Male	% from the total 27 male respondents	Female	% from the total 26 female respondents
Positive	13	48.1	11	42.3
Negative	18	60.6	15	57.6
Average	2	7.4	3	11.5

Respondents of both genders expressed negative perception of Odia cinema during our conversations. 60.6% of boys spoke disparagingly about Odia films, conveying that most of the films did not have an original script and did not match the standards of south Indian films. 48.1 % of the boys and 42.3% of the girls said that Odia cinema was progressing in terms of technology and content. Some of the films had good scripts and were appreciable.

Some of the respondents added that they liked to watch Odia films in the childhood when these were shown on TV on Sunday afternoons, and the whole family sat in front of TV to watch the movies. They felt that the new lots of Odia films were not up to their expectations. So, they found it more worthwhile to watch Telugu films which were full of action and drama. The storylines of the Telugu films were interesting and projected the heroines as sexy and attractive unlike the female leads of Odia films. They felt that

Telugu films were '*full time-pass*' films. This was the reason they preferred remakes as well.

As we have seen, the remakes appeal to the younger generation by connecting with their tastes and aspirations. In turn, the remake trend is influenced by changes in Odia culture and society. The respondents in my study lived in campuses with students coming from other states and their friend circle is often multi-cultured. The gender relations have changed as well. While parents in an earlier period were interested in training their daughters in household works to add to their marriage prospects even if they were educated; the parents now were more invested in preparing their daughters to be self sufficient. The youth also had a broader range of career options to choose from. Young girls from middle classes were no longer constrained to choose 'safe' professions such as teaching or particular branches of the field of Medicine. More and more fields of technical education, especially the field of Information Technology, have become widely accessible to young women from the middle class since the late 90s.

Section II

This section brings out some of the key points of this thesis and is also the conclusion. I have tried to explore in this thesis a largely under-researched, and marginalized arena of Indian regional cinema. However, through this research, I have discovered that the popular cinema of Odisha reflects and participate actively in the shifting gender relations of the region/nation. As we have seen, even the most mainstream and what may be branded as ‘regressive’ film reflects the cultural politics and contestations in the particular society in which it is produced.

In the introductory chapter, I felt it was important to evoke the cultural and religious contexts in which Odia cinema emerged. As Mohan Dev Goswami’s struggles to produce *Sita Bibaha* indicates it was also a search for a distinctly Odia identity. Significantly, Odia identity remained closely linked, right from this early moment, an upper caste norms and the Jagannatha culture in the way it represented women and the relations between upper and lower classes/castes. Although I could not find any cinema-related work to help me explore this aspect, the insightful analyses of Odia cultural and political conditions by literary and political theorists such as Manoranjan Mohanty, Biswamoy Pati and Satya P. Mohanty have greatly informed my analysis.

While looking at the films of the 60s in my second chapter, I tried to bring out how modernity was never a given, naturally emerging in a post-colonial society. It remained entangled in regional patriarchal practices and power relations. At this point of time, Odia cinema carried out the difficult task of negotiating a ‘modern’ without fundamentally questioning the feudal-patriarchal relations. The figure of the woman, as we have seen in *Malajanha*, became the site for such negotiation. Her desire and transgressions were finally addressed in an internal, psychological conflict within herself. However, these films offered a serious critique of gender relations in rural/patriarchal settings of the region.

Coming to the 70s, we find a re-consolidation of the patriarchal family becomes necessary. Many of the films such as *Jajabara* attempt to address the threats emerging from the unrest/protests in the society against feudal/state powers. However, as we have seen, it is the upper caste/middle class hero who is represented as the leader of the oppressed masses. We also note the appearance of more docile heroines, compared to the 60s. The concept of the ideal Odia woman as Lakshmi/Uma is more centred. As I have discussed with reference to *Gapa Hele bi Sata,* the female protagonist Uma is devoted to her husband Rajesh despite his great betrayal. The contrast between *Malajanha*'s Sati and *Gapa Hele bi Sata*'s Uma is striking. In *Malajanha* there is a struggle between the heroine's desire and the normative ideal of Odia womanhood. This largely goes missing in the 70s cinema. I have tried to understand this phenomenon as a response to a threat to traditional Odia society and state. The re-consolidation/re-location of the Odia ideal woman in the extended family continues into the 80s and the 90s. However, we also encounter the emergence of a 'new woman'—who is not willing to allow the injustices done against her go unpunished and unavenged. Yet, this revenge/resistance is strictly defined/regulated by the normative gender ideal. As I have already mentioned Netramani of *Para Jhia Ghara Bhangena* is demonized for hitting back at her husband despite the fact that he had used brute patriarchal power to gain control over her body, when she occupied a gravely marginalized position in the class and gender hierarchy of his world. However, the protagonist of *Uddandi Sita* is idealized despite her transgressions into the conventionally masculine domains of revenge and physical prowess as she does this out of loyalty for her husband and family. One can thus witness a more conservation articulation of the Odia family as sacrosanct and authoritative. I have tried to analyze this as a response to and containment of the questions emerging from the women's movement.

Coming to a more contemporary moment, the 2000s, it looks like the quest for authentic Odia identity and essence is completely lost in the rush by film makers to produce remakes. We have seen how Odia actors/directors from an older era, as well as journalists have lamented the loss of creativity and cultural authenticity. Film-making they feel is entirely reduced to profit-making. However, pushing beyond the narrative of degeneration, I have tried to look at changed the material, cultural conditions as well as the audience characteristics that make these remakes successful. As I have tried to indicate, the young audience of these remakes is no longer tied to an older notion of Odia identity or family. Gender relations have also changed with more and more women taking up careers in Engineering or Information Technology. The boundaries of the worlds of young, middle class audience of such films is also more flexible. Their friend circle has many members from outside the region and they aspire for a more cosmopolitan lifestyle.

Due to the constraints of time, within the scope of this thesis, I have only been able to point out the contemporary popular trends in Odia cinema and offered some limited initial observations. Do these trends point to a loosening of dominant/traditional gender relations in Odia society and pave way for more democratic gender relations? I do hope to research these questions more substantially at a later moment and hope other researchers will also pursue such questions emerging from popular cultural domain such as cinema. As of now, my tentative response to the above question is both yes and no. It is true that more and more girls, especially from the middle classes, are now allowed and in fact, encouraged to pursue professional careers traditionally considered as masculine domains. They are not expected to be tied down to the marital family, and may even be expected to travel with their husbands and add to the family income. At the same time, marriages are largely endogamous and one will be hard-pressed to find women marrying outside class/caste boundaries. Still, as I have mentioned, these are serious questions for further research.

Despite limited access to primary material and sometimes even to prints of old films, I could conduct this research, especially during the initial parts, because of the encouragement and time given by noted film personalities and actors and journalists such as Jharana Das, Sarat Pujari, Dilip Hali and Ashok Palit to name a few. Their memories and observations during conversations and interviews have greatly helped me to piece together a gendered history of Odia cinema.

This thesis is a small step toward engaging with Odia cinema as a subject for serious cultural and political analysis. As we have seen it offers unique insights on shifting gender relations in post-independence, post-colonial Odisha. It is not merely a reflection but also actively responds to and participates in the contestations over gender, class and caste in the society. Pioneering work has been done on early literary trends in Odisha by noted Odia scholars. I hope researchers from the social sciences and Humanities will also give the much-needed attention to the complex but neglected area of Odia cinema.

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