

Complexities of Revenge and Interpersonal Relationships: A Psychoanalytic Feminist Study of the Movies “Bulbbul” and “Qala” Directed by Anvita Dutt

Archisha Singh

Student, Central University of Rajasthan

Abstract

This research conducts a comprehensive feminist analysis of two of Anvita Dutt's acclaimed films, "Bulbbul" and "Qala," emphasising on the intricate interplay of revenge, interpersonal relationships, and the representation of women in commercial Hindi cinema. Recognizing cinema as a mirror reflecting societal ideologies, the examination commences with Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, considering films are transformative mirrors for viewers seeking self-identity through on-screen characters. Positioned at the crossroads of various feminist theories, the research addresses historical challenges posed by phallogocentric filmmaking, particularly within the South Asian context, where traditional gender roles and heteropatriarchal norms have marginalised women. Moving beyond initial frameworks like Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" and Judith Butler's "gender performativity," the analysis incorporates additional lenses, including Elaine Showalter's "three waves of feminism and intersectionality," providing a more comprehensive understanding. Drawing from John Bowlby's Attachment theory and feminist relational theory, the research explores the emotional landscape and power dynamics of characters in the films, unravelling nuanced interactions influenced by societal expectations and gender norms. The incorporation of postmodern feminist theories allows an examination of how the films challenge established gender norms through narrative experimentation. Methodologically, a mixed-methods approach, encompassing qualitative film analysis, content analysis, literature review, historical analysis, psychoanalytic examination, intersectional analysis, and a comparative analysis, ensures a holistic exploration. This research aims to contribute significantly to feminist film studies by delving into the intricate complexities of "Bulbbul" and "Qala," situated at the intersection of psychoanalytic, feminist, and sociological theories, providing a deeper understanding of how these films challenge traditional gender norms in the evolving tapestry of Indian cinema.

Keywords: film studies, cinema, women, patriarchy, marginalisation, feminism, revenge, relationships

Introduction

Historically, women's agency has been limited to stereotypical frames. Although cinema has been a witness to female centric narratives from time to time, the consumerist audience and market has always pushed for traditional and conservative dynamics because women, in their stereotypical space, align well with the shared traditional values of the Indian audience (Datta 71-82). The need to bring diverse and

human portrayals of women onscreen has only seen a steady incline because the conservative portrayals do more harm than good to the marginalised section of the patriarchal society. Indian cinema has played a major role in globalisation of skewed female portrayal, although since much focus is being laid on a wider audience, the narrative still conforms to the conservative standards. Traversing through the century old history of Indian filmmaking, women storytellers only took to filmmaking much recently. Marking a considerable shift in the way of portrayal, filmmakers like Anvita Dutt continually made attempts to bring feminine narratives to the centre stage, pulling them away from stereotypical light to the greyer shades of human, sophisticated representation, particularly highlighting dissent, retribution, independence, and revenge. Through *Bulbbul* and *Qala* we have tried to apply psychoanalytic measures to understand the aspects of depicted personalities that go beyond the camera, trying to establish a footing against patriarchal society, running parallel with the consumerist mainstream industry. Understanding these aspects becomes inherently necessary to truly judge the actual position of women in contemporary society. Throughout the paper, the analysis presented would be supported with theories and facts that would solidify our position and standing on the argument. Breaking away from the overused hero-heroine dynamics, profitable tropes, and narratives, diving deep into a femme lens provides valuable insights that lead us to question and reform society.

"*Qala*" and "*Bulbbul*," exemplify this shift by challenging traditional power dynamics and providing equal and empowered platforms for feminine characters. The history of women in Indian cinema mirrors the complex evolution of gender roles in Indian society. While regressive tropes and patriarchal influences have long prevailed, there is a growing recognition of the need for more nuanced and empowering portrayals of women in Indian films. The rise of female filmmakers and films that focus on women's stories marks a significant step towards breaking free from traditional stereotypes and providing equal opportunities for female characters in Indian cinema.

However, established theories would highly substantiate the arguments presented in the paper therefore the need to understand the psychology of characters behind the screen is equally important as truly representing them. Representation and understanding go together, the former complete the latter and vice-versa.

Revenge, a powerful and ageless cinematic motif, has frequently functioned as a device for examining the depths of human emotions as well as the subtle dynamics of power, justice, and revenge. In the sphere of Indian cinema, Anvita Dutt's "*Qala*" and "*Bulbbul*," ingeniously exploit revenge as a primary topic, enabling viewers to navigate a complicated narrative environment where vengeance is a driving force. Revenge is an interesting field of study in this regard. Unlike negative reciprocity, which is motivated by anger and holds the possibility of reconciliation, revenge stems from hatred and the desire to harm for its own sake.

Reciprocity (Molm), according to social psychology, is the act of responding to certain actions. People respond with kindness and are cooperative to friendly and positive actions while they respond in much more brutal ways to hostile actions. Hence negative reciprocity becomes the act of equally returning the act that was intended to negatively impact the concerned in the first place.

The goal of revenge, then, is not to persuade or coerce but to eliminate the very cause of oppression. Thus, in numerous instances of revenge, the victim's suffering because of the initial transgression pales in comparison to the suffering inflicted when they seek revenge. Now, while revenge can have various negative connotations, often for victims, revenge becomes the only way to retaliate. Movies play a direct role in shaping the psyche of their viewers, and commercial Hindi films are not indifferent to this. Apart

from building the narrative driven by vengeance or displaying the sense of retribution as the sole driving factor of the plot, much goes on behind the complex psyche. The overall narrative surrounding revenge can be a great form of representation altogether. In some instances, individuals or groups may see revenge to reclaim power, agency, or representation in the face of historical or ongoing oppression. It can also be viewed as a symbolic act that challenges dominant narratives. By taking matters into their own hands, individuals may seek to reshape the narrative around their experiences, demanding acknowledgment, and recognition. However, it is essential to consider the ethical dimensions of revenge. Engaging in retaliatory actions may perpetuate cycles of violence and further marginalises certain groups. Some argue for alternative approaches, such as reconciliation, dialogue, and systemic change, as more sustainable ways to address injustices. In literature, film, and other cultural forms, revenge is a common theme. Characters seeking revenge can be portrayed as complex figures challenging societal norms or as individuals consumed by their desire for retribution.

To further support the hypothesis surrounding the idea of vengeance as a tool for representation and narration, psychoanalytic studies shall be applied regarding the motifs used in the films, ‘Qala’ and ‘Bulbbul’ respectively.

Not only the sense of seeking retribution from one’s oppressors drives the marginalised representative to accept the narrative in their own accord and drive the plot forward, but the complex play of their interpersonal involvements contributes enough to their oppression. The web works both ways, with allies and foils on the either side, it becomes challenging to navigate through it all. The way protagonists steer through their interpersonal relationships is a brilliant way to highlight what women deal with daily. However, there is always some exaggeration and a touch of fictionality to sell the plot, but it is also true that unravelling the complex dynamic is one way to portray the narrative, subverting from the stereotypical mainstream dialogue. Interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in feminist film analysis as they provide a lens through which to examine and critique gender dynamics, power structures, and societal expectations. By offering insights into how women are portrayed in films, exploring their roles, agency, and complexities and by examining these relationships, feminist analysis can unveil stereotypes, challenge traditional norms, and highlight diverse expressions of femininity. Examining power dynamics within interpersonal relationships sheds light on how patriarchal influences manifest, providing a platform to challenge traditional gender roles and unveil societal norms perpetuated by cinema.

The portrayal of allies becomes a crucial aspect of analysis, showcasing solidarity and the potential subversion of narratives that pit women against each other. Interpersonal relationships also function as a gateway to understanding the intersectionality of identity markers, contributing to a nuanced exploration of the impact of gender, race, class, and sexuality. The examination of these relationships in feminist film analysis allows for the deconstruction of stereotypes, the assertion of agency by female characters, and narrative experimentation that challenges established gender norms.

Analysing ‘Revenge’ in ‘Qala’ and ‘Bulbbul.’

“Qala” and “Bulbbul,” though seminal, do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they arise from a cinematic heritage that already has a handful of depictions of women seeking vengeance in previous classics. To understand the intricate comparisons of vengeance in “Qala” and “Bulbbul,” it is necessary to place them within the larger historical framework of women seeking vengeance on the silver screen.

Firoze Rangoonwala calls the decade 1981–1992 “the age of revenge”. Around 1988, to break from the monotony, there were popular representations of hardened, cynical, vengeful women who did not tolerate

injustice. Examples of such movies could be Harmesh Malhotra's *Sherni*, Avtar Bhogal's *Zakhmi Aurat*, or Rakesh Roshan's *Khoon Bhari Maang*. The revengeful Indian women had entered cinema halls. But that was it, as romance grew as a genre, women were back to being the representation of home makers, wives and daughter in laws, things that suited the family paradigm portrayal on screen (Rahman). Navigating throughout the timeline, Dutt's films had totally changed the perspective and set a benchmark for directors, artists, and audience. "Bulbbul" and "Qala" were far away from generalised patriarchy, traditional cinema has been practising and really stands up and contributes meaning to the feminist discourse. The films portrayed women as humans, just as flawed as anyone else, went on to narrate their journey from being victims of oppression to the ones seeking their retribution from the perpetrators. The cause, execution and the consequences of the revenge are very different which gives us another purpose to look closely for the vengeance narrative embedded within the plot. Both, "Qala," and "Bulbbul" employ revenge to take back what patriarchy snatched from women in the first place, although we are made aware of the fact that revenge only does harm, to the victim as well as to the ones who enable oppression and patriarchy. Before we begin with the analysis of vengeance narratives and the social implication it holds, we must recollect the plot points that narrate and lead us through the very act of retribution. Bulbbul's sense of retribution starts from the day her aunt, her *Bishi Maa*, gets Bulbbul ready for her marriage. This is the origin of revenge from oppression, everything in the movie has to do with controlling and containing the future you walk to. A child who must grow up laden with the responsibilities of a *Badi Bahu* (elder daughter in law) is a tragedy (Mrudula 1-2). Bulbbul is an innocent girl, trying to learn and grab the mannerisms of the haveli, where she never belonged. Her juvenile friendship with Satya, her brother-in-law, is perceived as an affair. The tipping point, however, occurs when Bulbbul is subjected to a terrible assault at the hands of Indranil, leaving her physically and mentally damaged. Her anguish is exacerbated when Mahendra sexually abuses her, exposing the depths of her weakness. Bulbbul succumbs to her trials in a tragic turn of events, yet her journey does not end there. Her resurrection as an angry chudail is a metaphor for the vengeance she seeks against every man in the community, who think they have an infinite right over their women. Her feet, which were always bare and free are now trapped in boots, Bulbbul changes from being a naive young girl who stammers through her sentences and is afraid to be alone to someone who becomes the matriarch of the haveli, shutting people down when she wants to talk. However, following her acts of seeking revenge from the oppressors, Bulbbul eventually dies in a forest fire caused when Satya and Dr. Sudeep venture out to find the chudail.

Following the plot events, the motif of revenge can be truly understood as a complex interplay of Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts, weaving together the dynamics of revenge, societal influences, and individual identity.

Lacanian psychoanalysis, a theoretical framework developed by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, represents a distinctive offset from traditional psychoanalytic approaches while building upon Sigmund Freud's foundational concepts. At its core, Lacanian psychoanalysis delineates the human psyche into three interconnected realms: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, revenge in "Bulbbul" can be understood as a psychotic mix of desire, lack, and the symbolic order. The character Bulbbul's vengeful pursuit is deeply rooted in a fundamental "lack" created by the traumatic experiences of patriarchal oppression and violence she endures. The "Imaginary" is relevant as Bulbbul seeks revenge not only as a redressal of personal wrongs but also as a reconstruction of her own identity and agency. The act of revenge becomes a symbolic gesture, a response to the societal norms and power imbalances represented by the oppressive male figures in the narrative. Moreover, the film's exploration

of the return of the repressed aligns with Lacan's idea that the unconscious, laden with unspoken traumas, resurfaces in unexpected ways.

Revenge thus operates as a symbolic response to societal norms, a reclaiming of agency and justice, and a manifestation of the unconscious struggles against oppressive structures.

Revenge intersects with personal identity as Bulbul navigates her quest within the broader context of societal expectations. The clash between personal desires for retribution and societal norms becomes a central theme, reflecting the complexity of identity formation within a patriarchal framework. Darintip Chansit, in his paper, "Subjectivity and Revenge in Karen M. McManus's *One of Us Is Lying*", talks about the Lacanian aspect of revenge, drawing insights from Bohm and Kaplan (2011, p. 34). As discussed above, the act of revenge is the idea of the maintenance of the image of self. Drawing on the above conclusion, when the image of self is snatched from the subject, there is a lack of desire, a desire that the subject has always lived for. Revenge becomes the only tool to reinstate the lost desire and preserve self-identity or self-image. Further, Darintip states that the idea of ideal revenge is subject to failure. This statement stands true to the narrative of Bulbul where she is depicted to be burned in a forest fire and dead. The film therefore cannot be read as the glorification of revenge, rather a study into what leads to the very act. Moreover, the psyche behind revenge is not standalone but is a crucial element in the mix of several social stances driving each one around.

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasises the interconnected nature of various social categories, such as gender, race, class and more, and how they intersect to shape an individual's experiences. Bulbul's revenge narrative is rooted in understanding how personal identity and societal expectations collide within a patriarchal framework. Bulbul's personal identity is intricately connected to her quest for revenge. The experiences of trauma, oppression, and injustice shape her individual sense of self and fuel her desire for retribution. The personal narrative of revenge becomes a means for Bulbul to assert her agency and autonomy, reflecting her individual identity forged through lived experiences. Within the patriarchal framework depicted in the film, societal expectations and norms play a significant role in shaping women's identities. Bulbul's identity is not formed in isolation but is constantly influenced by the expectations imposed by the broader society. The clash between her personal desires for revenge and societal norms becomes a central theme, highlighting the tension between individual agency and external influences. The revenge narrative becomes a locus of complexity in identity formation. The clash between her personal desires and the prescribed roles for women in the patriarchal context adds layers of complexity to her identity formation. Bulbul navigates a delicate balance between her personal desires for retribution and the societal norms that seek to constrain her actions. The intersectionality of her identity involves considering not only her gender but also other aspects like her socio-economic background and marital status. The revenge narrative becomes a battleground where personal agency intersects with the expectations placed on her by virtue of these intersecting identities. The clash between personal identity and societal expectations in Bulbul's revenge narrative mirrors real-world struggles faced by individuals navigating intersecting identities within patriarchal structures. The film reflects the broader issue of how societal norms influence and constrain the formation of personal identity, especially for women at the intersections of various social categories.

In "Qala," our protagonist and her mother share a complex relationship and it is the validation from her mother that makes Qala cross boundaries, even when it comes at the cost of her morality, or in greater sense, her sanity. But it is not the simple caregiver-child relationship of love. Urmila loses Qala's twin brother at birth and the blame is put on Qala being competitive, something she does not let go of as she

grows up. We see parts of Qala's training as a child, to be a pandit, not a bai, scolded more than she is appreciated, as she grows more and more fearful of her mother all the while craving for her affection. Qala's poisoning of Jagan is an indirect act of revenge from her mother who pushed Qala to this extent, to poison someone innocent. It was Urmila's lack of regard for her daughter, not Jagan as Qala thinks, that is the cause of Qala's miseries and her misplaced actions. Another form of revenge worth analysing here, is the revenge Qala takes from herself. Qala is not driven by evil, the limelight she was placed in was never her dream, it was her mother's dream. In a scene where she confronts with the memory of Jagan, he asks her.

“Khush hai?” (are you happy)

Qala nods in a no and says, “ma to abhi bhi nahi hai” (i still do not have my mother)

At this point Qala understands that the game she is playing; she has already lost and as a result, ends her life. Both Jagan and Qala become victims of the very loss of dream, the movie is based on. Following the above narrative, the observation regarding Qala's pursuit of revenge, labelling Qala's actions as motives to seek revenge stand true in the regard of psychological underpinnings. This analysis delves into the complex psychological landscape that shaped Qala's actions, shedding light on the multifaceted layers of her motivations. Her early life was marked by a patriarchal and suppressive environment, contributing significantly to her sense of injustice. This backdrop set the stage for her tumultuous relationship with her mother, who herself grappled with societal norms. Qala's quest for love and validation from her mother became a recurring theme, juxtaposed against a backdrop of indifference and neglect, exacerbating her internal turmoil.

The pivotal point in Qala's narrative unfolds with the introduction of Jagan, inadvertently becoming the receptacle for Qala's accumulated frustration and the embodiment of her quest for retribution. Observing her mother's preferential treatment towards Jagan, Qala channelled her resentment through actions aimed at harming Jagan's voice – a symbolic act against her mother's oppressive attitudes.

Qala's attempt to harm Jagan's voice takes a tragic turn, leading to his suicide. This turn of events, while initially appearing as a manifestation of Qala's revenge, introduces a nuanced layer to the narrative. Jagan's suicide can be construed as a retaliatory act, where he inflicts harm upon himself. In doing so, he inadvertently places Qala in a perpetual state of guilt, making her suffer through the consequences of her retribution for her lifetime until she meets the same fate.

Qala has been prone to victimisation where her self-worth was constantly hampered owing to her mother's discriminatory and harsh actions towards her. Decline of self-worth is directly related to the act of becoming a victim, which propagates towards the development of spiteful thoughts and actions to reclaim the damaged worth (*Embitterment* 42–63). Our observation stands true regarding Qala that her continuous exposure to pressure for proving herself as a singer, adhering to patriarchal notions, exposed her to a chain of traumatic experiences (Hazarika and Dowerah 7-8). This resulted in the decline of her self-worth. Hence to cope with the feelings of helplessness and to restore her broken self-efficacy, Qala developed vengeful feelings (*Embitterment* 57) and took them out on the person who was on the receiving end of emotions that Qala desired since childhood.

Interpersonal Relationships in ‘Qala,’ and Bulbul:

Bulbul's entire tragedy depends on the relationship she shares with people around her. These people take different roles, often shifting characters like people do in real life, as circumstances spin them around. The residents of the haveli are not her allies, even when she thinks they are. The three brothers represent

different kinds of ways men often sabotage women in life. Indranil, the patriarch of the household, respected or feared by everyone, is respectful towards her much younger bride but only until he senses something brewing between her and his brother. This is when the inflated ego is shattered and Indranil beats and cripples Bulbbul. In the scene right after he sends Satya away, Indranil confronts Bulbbul about the diary saying,

“Mann me chor hai?” (roughly, are you hiding something?)

She replies, *“Nahi bass kuch niji kaam tha humara”* (nothing, just some personal business of mine)

Disappointed he says *“Ek patni ka uske pati ke alawa kya niji hota hai?”* (what is more personal to a wife than her husband?).

Pointing that he understands the things that are happening under his nose. But Indranil is a hypocrite at best. He is the primary cause of Bulbbul’s suffering and her ultimate prey for retribution. Indranil represents men who treat women around them as props on display, pretty and signed in their name.

Mahendra, who is a child trapped in a grown man’s body, is a predator. He becomes the symbol for innocent men who are just as vile as others who do not pretend. He assaults Bulbbul to her metaphoric death and thus becomes the first person she eliminates. Mahendra’s psyche is more complex as when he cannot understand the adult world, he does understand lust, probably because he has grown up watching women being abused, which knocks deeper at the functioning of Indian households.

Satya represents men who present themselves as allies, mostly to be liked by women but will not stand for the very women, against the men he idealises. Before he is sent away, Satya is Bulbbul’s play mate but one sees a shift when he interacts with the Bulbbul who is not naive and submissive anymore. Amazed to see the change in her character, he asks.

“Choti si badi bahu thi, kahan gyi wo kya kiya aapne uske saath” (where did our tiny elder daughter in law go? What did you do to her?)

Ferociously Bulbbul replies, *“Kha gayi”* (I ate her)

Indranil is the father figure to Satya, who idealises him to the point he sees no wrong in men. He tries to break out from it with the dynamic he shares with Bulbbul, but it is not possible, Bulbbul is a mother to him. But even in this case, Satya does not want to give back the power of being the new “man of the house.” In the scene where he sees Bulbbul’s feet in the doctor’s lap, that sense of containing Bulbbul into the house, seems lost, now as the brave protector of the sanctity of the house, he accuses Bulbbul of misconduct.

We can further understand these dynamics through psychoanalytic frameworks and understand the importance of such dynamics in shaping a certain narrative, contributing to the central driving force of the plot, that is revenge. Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, posits that early relationships, especially with caregivers, significantly influence an individual's emotional and relational development. The quality of these early attachments shapes one's expectations, beliefs, and behaviours in future relationships. Attachment styles, such as secure, insecure (anxious or avoidant), and disorganised, impact how individuals approach intimacy, trust, and connection throughout their lives.

On the other hand, Feminist relational theory explores how power, gender roles, and societal structures influence and shape relationships. It focuses on understanding the dynamics of power, examining how individuals navigate and resist oppressive structures within their interpersonal connections. Out of the various aspects of feminist relational theories, interpersonal relationships do provide a part of the broader picture relating to personhood and agency of autonomy (Koggel et al. 04)

The three men in Anvita Dutt’s “Bulbbul” are stark parallels of what one calls allies and foils. In context

to feminist lens, Indranil and Mahendra are downright abusers who inflicted Bulbbul with trauma and led to the development of vengeance uncovered later. However, Satya, Bulbbul's brother-in-law who is an ally, idolises his brother Indranil and shares the same set of thoughts on women, the only difference being, he does not employ physical abuse against Bulbbul. However, that does not make him any better. The women in the film throw light on how women can be the biggest enemies of their tribe, however this narrative is not straightforward because the way women in this film behave; their stature towards Bulbbul is the result of ingrained patriarchy and oppressive notions of the society. Hence, they are conditioned to behave the way they were presented, much like the men, the only difference is that they themselves were victims of what they enabled (Alves).

In "Qala," the conflict at the centre is between Qala and her mother. Urmila represents patriarchy in the film, she wants a "pandit" and Qala becomes the reason for loss of not one but two of her sons. At the beginning of her training, Urmila tells Bulbbul,

"Naam ke aage pandit lagna chahiye, uske peeche bai nahi, tab-hi kuch bann sakogi, karr sakogi? Kuch bann sakogi?"

(One should be addressed as a maestro not a courtesan, only then will you be successful, will you be able to do it? Are you capable of achieving that kind of success)

The scene highlights how deep the mindset of patriarchy is engrained in her. Is Urmila a bad person? Probably not. She comes from a place of suffering herself. Urmila understands how tough it is for women to reach great success and protect their "honour" at the same time, that Qala needs to be phenomenal in order to succeed through just her talent. Urmila breaks from the stereotypical mother, she makes selfish decisions for she has repressed desires of her own, she is fearful both for Qala and herself, considering that she is the caregiver, this is her idea of caring, caging Qala. Her flaw is that she never becomes Qala's ally. In fact, she discards Qala when she finds a better "male" singer in the form of Jagan. She finally goes back, but only when it is too late. Urmila realises that it was her, who pushed Qala to this point. In the final scenes of the movie, she fights for Qala's life, but in vain. The only thing left with Urmila now are Qala's songs.

Qala supports women around her indelibly, it is through these many brief interactions with/about/around her that we get to know that Qala is, in fact, not like her mother. She understands the need for solidarity in spaces where women are treated as others.

Women were referred to as significant entities with absolute control over the idea of self as an individual. They were always related with the completeness of a man and were regarded as the Other, different from the reference of man, deemed inessential. While the man was deemed as the subject, she was classified as the other, insignificant, dependent, and inessential.

Qala's mannerisms may be inherited but her ideals are her own. Thus, it becomes easier to sympathise with a character like Qala, she is not driven by evil, but is in fact a deeply troubled individual who does things that provide her momentary benefit.

Through the film, Dutt tries to bring out the horrors of abusive parenting, and its effects on children and the relationships that they make later in their life. Parental abuse is so significant that it has its grips throughout the child's life, wherever they go, whoever they meet. The cycle of abuse never leaves the victim, and they cannot see themselves to let them out, feeling invisible, worthless, and rejected oftentimes. Qala is unable to form any close relationships, later in her life due to the very same reason, with her mother constantly stonewalling her, her mental health further deteriorates with no support from either the doctor, or the society. It is only when Qala attempts suicide, when her mother visits to see her

and wait for her. It took Qala to end her life to make her mother visit her. Internalised misogyny and authoritarian parenting shatters every prospect of the parent as well as the child (Vikas).

In both "Bulbbul" and "Qala," male allies play crucial roles in the development of the female protagonists, aiding their growth and providing a sense of safety amidst the challenging circumstances they face.

In "Bulbbul," Dr. Sudeep emerges as a key male ally for the protagonist. His character stands in contrast to authoritarian and patriarchal figures such as Indranil and Mahendra. He is a kind and empathetic presence who offers Bulbbul support and empathy. He listens to her, respects her authority, and helps her get medical care when she needs it.

Feminists look up to men who provide autonomous support while they take the backseat. Men who focus on supporting rather than solving the problem themselves. Hence being an ally is not about snatching the stage and doing the work yourself but providing enough support so that women can walk comfortably on the stage meant for their representation (Wiley and Dunne 01). Hence Dr. Sudeep is the embodiment of such men.

This dynamic stands in stark contrast to Bulbbul's relationships with the Thakur family's male characters, emphasising Dr. Sudeep's status as a source of comfort and security for Bulbbul. Bulbbul finds comfort and protection in a world plagued with injustice and torture because of his genuine concern for her well-being. Furthermore, Dr. Sudeep's character development intersects with Bulbbul's journey, as he becomes a vital component of the narrative, propelling the plot along with his interactions with the major characters. Majrooh also serves as a male ally in "Qala," assisting the female protagonist's development. Majrooh unconditionally supports and companions Qala, allowing her to freely express herself and explore her artistic talents. Their relationship is marked by mutual respect and understanding, which allows Qala to be herself. Majrooh's presence allows Qala to overcome the constraints set by her mother, Urmila, and pursue her musical passion. His conviction in Qala's skill and readiness to support her contributed to her development as an artist and as a person. Majrooh's influence on Qala's journey is crucial in moulding the narrative, as he serves as a catalyst for her artistic awakening and plays a role in the plot's denouement.

These male supporters serve as pillars of support in both films, creating safe spaces for the female protagonists to develop, express themselves, and find consolation. They provide a contrast to the repressive masculine roles by challenging the typical gender dynamics prevalent in the narratives. Dr. Sudeep and Majrooh's good influence contributes to the overall empowerment and growth of Bulbbul and Qala, illustrating the possibilities for strong male-female alliances in the face of hardship.

Conclusion:

The above paper has employed theoretical frameworks to particularly understand the psyche of revenge and the role of interpersonal relationships in shaping the narrative and aiding the act of revenge, through a feminist lens. Post analysis it would be fair to observe that Anvita Dutt has not only created films on social issues concerning women but has successfully unmasked the blatant subjugation of women that the society has been practising, all the while providing a scope and opportunity to apply contemporary field of studies to better understand the sociological position of women in India in particular. Through *Bulbbul* and *Qala*, Dutt has successfully delivered the message that only when women would adopt extreme measures, their oppression would be noticed, and the suffering would end. However, it seems empowering but the need to adapt to extreme measures is a statement regarding the present scenario of the society. These two films also deal with Laura Mulvey's male gaze in contradiction where Anvita Dutt has tried to present the world of cinema with the female gaze (Vanya Lochan). The films, on the other hand, also raise

awareness regarding sexual and gendered violence against women. Analysing the actions and consequences thereafter through theories and feminist lenses led us to develop an intersectional understanding of violence and the feeling of revenge it instils thereafter, leaving the victim with no regard for the consequence. However, a concern of commodification of sexual violence and the retaliatory measures taken thereafter is raised (Karki 01), Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* does show the act of violence under a horrifying score but that seems necessary to instil a feeling of sympathy and rage, with an ulterior motive to provide a positive lens to the folklore of, 'Chudail' as a means of resistance against patriarchy (Singh et al. 4017). As with *Qala*, eventual suicide seemed like an ultimate means of escape from, both psychological and sociological constraints (Bhattacharyya 10).

Hence theoretical insights help in understanding the subtle nuances of oppression, violence and the act of retaliation depicted in films making cinema a brilliant tool for portraying empowering narratives for the marginalised sections of the society.

REFERENCES:

1. *Watch Bulbbul | Netflix Official Site*. (n.d.). <https://www.netflix.com/title/81029150>
2. *Watch Qala | Netflix Official Site*. (n.d.). <https://www.netflix.com/title/81423081>
3. Rahman, M. (2013, November 26). Hindi films: On screen, it is no longer men alone who is spilling blood. *India Today*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-and-the-arts/story/19880715-hindi-films-on-screen-it-is-no-longer-men-alone-who-is-spilling-blood-797492-1988-07-14>.
4. Mrudula, P. (2020). *Bulbbul: Not just another feminist tale*. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 5(4), 1224–1225. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.54.57>
5. Hazarika, K., & Dowerah, S. (2023). Rethinking gender discriminations in modern India: reading *Qala* from a feminist perspective. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(2), 704–711. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2186821>
6. Alves, Genesis, host. "Anvita Dutt on Binodini from 'Bulbbul'", *The Best Parts*, Spotify, 31 Mar. 2023, www.spotify.in
7. Globalisation and Representations of Women in Indian Cinema on JSTOR. (n.d.). www.jstor.org. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/351819>
8. Bhattacharyya, A. (2023). The Curious Case of Patriarchal Motherhood in *Qala* (2022): A Psychoanalytic approach. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2023.2198921>
9. Karki, I. (2019). *Scripting resistance: rape and the avenging woman in Hindi cinema*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Scripting-resistance%3A-and-the-avenging-woman-Karki/6973eacfe933237b206d66bc0f725086e25a1f57>
10. Kumari, P. (2023b). A Psychoanalytic-Feminist study of gender bias in Indian cinema. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 8(2), 245–248. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.82.35>
11. Manohar, U., & Kline, S. L. (2014b). Sexual assault portrayals in Hindi cinema. *Sex Roles*, 71(5–8), 233–245. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0404-6>
12. *Lacans Psychoanalyse – ICCPP*. (n.d.). <http://surl.li/rbftv>
13. Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), 759–775. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.759>
14. Böhm, T., Kaplan, S., & Boston, P. (2018). *Revenge*. In *Routledge eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429479663>

15. Chansit, D. (2021). Subjectivity and revenge in Karen M. McManus's One of Us is lying. *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*, 10(2), 50–67. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijl.10.2.03>
16. Gäbler, I., & Maercker, A. (2011). Revenge after Trauma: Theoretical outline. In *Embitterment* (pp. 42–69). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-99741-3_5
17. Wiley, S., & Dunne, C. (2018). Comrades in the Struggle? Feminist Women Prefer Male Allies Who Offer Autonomy- not Dependency-Oriented Help. *Sex Roles*, 80(11–12), 656–666. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0970-0>
18. Vikas, K. S. (2022, December 23). *Qala: Anvita Dutt's Psychological Dive into the Horrors of Abusive Parenting*. Smashboard. <https://smashboard.org/qala-anvita-dutts-psychological-dive-into-the-horrors-of-abusive-parenting/>
19. Vanya Lochan, & Vanya Lochan. (2020, July 16). *The female gaze of Anvita Dutt in Netflix's 'Bulbbul.'* Homegrown. <https://homegrown.co.in/homegrown-voices/the-female-gaze-of-anvita-dutt-in-netflixs-bulbbul>
20. A STUDY ON THE PANORAMIC TRUTH OF BULBBUL. (2023). *European Chemical Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.48047/ecb>
21. Molm, L. D. (2010). The structure of reciprocity. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73(2), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272510369079>
22. De Beauvoir, S., & De Beauvoir, S. (n.d.). *Simone de Beauvoir The Second Sex, Woman as Other 1949*. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm#:~:text=She%20is%20defined%20and%20differentiated,as%20primordial%20as%20consciousness%20itself>.