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Representation of Gender, Sexuality and Changing Relationships: A Study of Film *Bulbbul* by Anvita Dutt

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Abstract: This paper investigates the representational dynamics in Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* (2020), positioning the film at the intersection of Feminist New Wave Cinema, psychological horror, and contemporary Indian film studies. The research tests the hypothesis that *Bulbbul* serves as a site for reconfiguring gender, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships within modern societal contexts. By synthesizing Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with Gayle S. Rubin's conceptualization of sexuality, this study deconstructs the restrictive identities imposed upon women—ranging from child-bride to sister-in-law. Often categorized as a 'complaint box' or cult feminist text, the film acts as a visceral critique of domestic oppression. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Bulbbul* dismantles systemic taboos, repositioning the female subject by challenging traditional notions of disability and gendered expectations.

Keywords: *Bulbbul*, Anvita Dutt Guptan, Social Transformation, Films, and Social Media

Introduction

The landscape of Indian Parallel Cinema emerged in the early twentieth century as a radical departure from the artifice of commercial Bollywood, grounding itself in the stark, socio-political authenticity of Italian Neo-Realism. Following the global shift toward European Art Cinema after the World Wars, this movement gained international momentum at forums like the Cannes Film Festival, championing low-budget, high-concept narratives that lacked mainstream financial backing. Pioneers such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen defined this era by capturing the "realistic" struggles of a post-colonial nation.

However, the post-1990s era signaled a transition from traditional Parallel Cinema to "New Indian Cinema" or "Post-Parallel Cinema." This evolution merged the aesthetic sophistication and narrative experimentation of global cinema with local sensibilities, often re-integrating elements like stylized visuals and atmospheric soundscapes while maintaining a core of social critique. Anvita Dutt Guptan's *Bulbbul* (2020) stands as a definitive text within this New Wave, utilizing the Psychological Drama and Horror genres to address contemporary shifts in human relationships. By applying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Gayle S. Rubin's frameworks on sexuality, this paper examines how *Bulbbul* deconstructs the suppressive identity roles imposed on women. In doing so, it positions the film as a modern "complaint box," dismantling societal taboos and re-imagining the agency of the female subject in the face of systemic oppression.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative multi-method approach to investigate the shifting paradigms of female representation in Indian cinema. The study is primarily grounded in a comparative analysis between the classic Parallel Cinema movement and the contemporary Post-Parallel "New Wave." To address the first research objective, the paper conducts a longitudinal reading of Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* (1974) alongside Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* (2020). By selecting *Ankur* as a representative pillar of 1970s realism, the study establishes a socio-historical benchmark against which the stylized, Gothic subversions of *Bulbbul* can be measured. This comparative lens allows for a clear mapping of how the "realistic" portrayal of female subjugation has evolved into a more complex, aestheticized form of resistance in modern cinema. To analyze the specific nuances of gender and sexuality within the primary text, the study employs narrative textual analysis as its core analytical tool. This method facilitates a deep dive into the semiotics, cinematography, and character arcs that define the protagonist's journey. This textual deconstruction is further supported by a process of theoretical triangulation, integrating Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and Gayle S. Rubin's frameworks on sexual hierarchies. By applying these theories, the research moves beyond surface-level

plot summary to examine how identity is both performed and dismantled within the film's patriarchal structure.

Literature Review

The academic discourse surrounding Indian cinema has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving from the socio-political realism of the mid-twentieth century to the fractured, psychological narratives of the contemporary era. This literature review situates *Bulbbul* (2020) within the intersection of Parallel Cinema history, Feminist Film Theory, and the evolution of the "Post-Parallel" aesthetic. Early scholarship by Satyajit Ray (1948) and later critiques by Chidananda Das Gupta (1980) establish that Indian Parallel Cinema was born out of a rejection of the "escapist" tendencies of mainstream Bollywood. Influenced by Italian Neo-Realism, these films focused on the "authentic" portrayal of the marginalized. Shyam Benegal's work, particularly *Ankur* (1974), is often cited by scholars such as Ashish Rajadhyaksha as a pivotal moment where the rural subaltern—specifically the Dalit woman—became a site of cinematic inquiry. However, as Laura Mulvey (1975) argues in her seminal work on the "Male Gaze," even within realist cinema, the female subject often remains an object of patriarchal observation, a "vessel" for male-driven plot progression rather than a self-actualized agent.

The transition following the 1990s liberalization of India led to what scholars like M. Madhava Prasad describe as a "displacement of the realist aesthetic." Modern cinema began to embrace high production values and genre-blending (Gothic, Horror, Fantasy) to explore internal psychological landscapes. Barbara Creed (1993), in her work on the "Monstrous-Feminine," provides a vital framework for understanding this shift. She suggests that in horror, the female body is often depicted as terrifying to patriarchy because of its inherent power. This aligns with the "Feminist New Wave" in India, where directors like Anvita Dutt move away from the "poverty porn" or pure realism of the 1970s toward a more "aestheticized resistance."

The internal dynamics of the Bengali aristocratic class, or the *Bhadralok*, have been extensively studied in relation to the "Woman Question" in India. Partha Chatterjee (1989) notes that the home became the spiritual site of national identity, where women were expected to perform "purity" and "grace." This is where Judith Butler's (1990) theory of Gender Performativity becomes essential to the current study. Butler argues that gender is not an inherent essence but a repeated set of acts. Recent scholarship on *Bulbbul* suggests that the protagonist's transition from a submissive "Thakurain" to a "Chudail" is a literal dismantling of this performance.

Finally, the representation of female sexuality in Indian cinema has long been a site of censorship and taboo. Gayle S. Rubin's (1984) "Thinking Sex" introduces the concept of the "Charmed Circle," which distinguishes between "good" (procreative, marital) and "bad" (non-conformist, autonomous) sexuality.

Scholars of contemporary Indian film argue that New Wave cinema is increasingly breaking out of this circle. By portraying the "demon-woman" as a savior rather than a villain, films like *Bulbbul* reposition female sexuality and autonomy as a "Resisting Force" against the traditional "castration anxiety" described by Kaja Silverman.

The 1950s was the era of Social Realism, heavily influenced by Italian Neo-Realism. In this mode, the camera acted as an objective observer, documenting the material conditions of poverty, caste, and rural life. The goal was "truth" through simplicity. Films like Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* or early Parallel Cinema works focused on the external struggle—the lack of resources, the oppression of the landlord, and the physical survival of the protagonist.

By the 1970s, as seen in *Ankur*, the mode shifted toward Political Realism. The focus remained on the "real," but the narrative became a sharp critique of power structures. Here, the female body became a site where caste and gender violence intersected. However, the resolution was often pessimistic; the "complaint" was lodged, but the victim remained trapped within the realistic confines of their socio-economic status.

In the contemporary era, specifically with the rise of New Indian Cinema and production houses like Clean Slate Filmz, the mode has transitioned into Psychological Horror and the Gothic. In *Bulbbul*, the objective camera is replaced by a subjective, "affective" lens. The focus is no longer just on the external "broken nest," but on the internal subversion of the protagonist.

This modern mode allows for the "supernatural" to serve as a metaphor for psychological liberation. While the 1950s realist mode would end with a woman trapped in her circumstances, the modern psychological horror mode allows the "Complaint Box" to burst open, using genre elements to grant the female subject an agency that reality—and traditional realism—historically denied her.

Discourses on Gender and Sexuality: From "Othering" to Subversion

The representation of gender in postcolonial discourse has long been synonymous with the concept of the "Other." This process of "Othering" is reinforced through regulatory and exclusionary practices that persist despite constitutional amendments and judicial reforms. To understand this marginalization, one must first deconstruct the term "gender." As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics, norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a man, woman, boy, or girl. Because gender is a social construct rather than a biological imperative, it varies across cultures and evolves over time.

However, the journey of identification for those who fall outside these constructs is often marked by emotional tragedy and psychological pain. This struggle for self-knowledge mirrors what Jacques Lacan refers to as the "Gestalt"; the individual possesses an inherent desire to know the true self, yet a

psyche governed by Oedipal structures often fails to reach a conclusion that encompasses the fluidity of gender and sexuality.

Building on the idea of social construction, Judith Butler argues that society maintains a "domain of cultural intelligibility" that rejects non-conforming identities as "logical impossibilities" or "developmental failures" (Butler 24). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler introduces the concept of "Intelligible Genders," which are those that maintain a coherent continuity between biological sex, gender performance, and sexual desire. She posits that any "incoherence" in this chain is actively prohibited by social laws to maintain patriarchal order.

This critique of gender is further expanded by Gayle S. Rubin in her seminal essay, *The Traffic in Women* (1975). Rubin critiques how foundational thinkers like Marx, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss failed to account for women's unique oppression, focusing instead on male-centered social structures. In *Thinking Sex*, Rubin further distinguishes between gender and sexuality, arguing against the "cultural fusion" that assumes a theory of sexuality can be derived directly from a theory of gender. She notes that while "sex" refers to gender identity, it also encompasses lust and sexual activity—dimensions that cannot be reduced to simple binary relations (Rubin 169).

The conceptualization of identity is inextricably linked to how individuals are represented within the cultural landscape. According to Pramod K. Nayar (2008), an individual's identity is shaped by the activities they perform and the signs they consume. Cinema serves as a primary site for this "sign consumption," where the meaning-making process either reinforces or dismantles existing norms. As Butler suggests, representation serves a dual purpose: it extends political visibility and legitimacy to women, while simultaneously functioning as a linguistic norm that can either reveal or distort the "truth" of the female category (Butler 2).

Etymologically, "representation" (from the Latin *repraesentare*) signifies "making present again" (Lewis). In the context of New Indian Cinema, this "re-presentation" is crucial for breaking stereotypes. Historically, Indian cinema relegated women to domestic activities—cooking, cleaning, and nurturing—while men were depicted as the "strong" and "capable" counterparts. However, as Mary Beltran notes, representation in modern media involves a complex interplay of visual and narrative meanings that convey specific socio-political messages (Beltran 97). By "re-presenting" gender in films like *Bulbbul*, the medium moves beyond traditional models, assigning new roles that challenge the legal, economic, and social visibility of the female subject.

Deconstructing the "Chudail": Agency through the Monstrous-Feminine

Bulbbul functions as a subversive reimagining of the folklore surrounding the "Chudail" (the demon-woman). In traditional patriarchal narratives, the Chudail is a figure of fear, characterized by her "twisted feet"—a physical marking of her deviance and "otherness." However, Anvita Dutt repositions this disability. The film meticulously tracks the protagonist's journey from a child bride, whose identity is "suppressed" by the regulatory norms of the *Bhadralok household*, to a supernatural force of retribution. By the time Bulbbul's feet are shattered by her brother-in-law, the film has already established her domestic life as a site of "performance" (Butler), where her only value lies in her silence and beauty.

Before her transformation, Bulbbul's life is a series of repeated acts designed to maintain the "coherence" of her role as the Lady of the House. Her heavy silks, intricate jewelry, and constant surveillance by the men in the family (Indranil and Mahendra) represent the "regulatory aims" of the patriarchal matrix. As Butler suggests, these gender roles are not innate but are "performed" under the threat of violence. Bulbbul's enigmatic smile and her adherence to the household codes are her survival strategy—a performance of the "perfect woman" that masks her deep-seated psychological pain and repressed desire for Satyajeet.

Applying Gayle S. Rubin's theory of the "Charmed Circle," we see that the violence inflicted upon Bulbbul occurs when she is perceived to have stepped outside the boundaries of "sanctioned" sexuality. Her intellectual and emotional bond with Satyajeet (the "Amal" figure) is viewed as a threat to the marital order. The rape and physical mutilation she suffers are patriarchal attempts to "castrate" her agency and return her to a state of total submission. However, the film refuses to stay within the "Realist" mode of *Ankur*. Instead, it moves into the realm of Psychological Horror, where her physical "disability" becomes the catalyst for her metamorphosis.

The symbolism of the blood-red forest and the transformation into the *Chudail* marks the end of her suppressive roles as wife and sister-in-law. She ceases to be an "Other" defined by the male gaze and instead becomes a "Resisting Force." Her acts of killing are presented not as "evil," but as an "écriture feminine" written in blood—a necessary violence to dismantle the taboos associated with female autonomy. By the end of the film, Bulbbul is no longer the "Lonely Wife" of Ray's era; she is a self-actualized entity who has moved from the margins to the center, effectively repositioning herself in society by burning down the very structures that sought to confine her.

In this sequence, the transition from a playful child to a "Thakurain" (Lady of the House) serves as the primary site for what Judith Butler describes as the "institution of coherence." As the young Bulbbul is adorned with heavy jewelry, the ornate *alta* (red dye) on her feet, and the *bicchiya* (toe rings), the "spectre of discontinuity" is systematically erased. These objects are not merely decorative; they are semiotic tools used to enforce a causal connection between her biological sex and her culturally constituted role as a bride.

Using Butler's framework, the "intelligibility" of Bulbbul as a gendered subject is dependent on her performance of these roles. The heavy ornaments serve as a physical weight that anchors her to the patriarchal domestic space. When she is told that the toe rings are meant to "press a nerve that keeps her in check," the film explicitly highlights the regulatory aims of the gender matrix. This scene captures the "Gestalt" desire for self-knowledge—Bulbbul looks at herself in the mirror, attempting to identify with the reflection that society has constructed for her, yet the "Oedipal ideas" of the Bhadrakok class prevent her from reaching a true conclusion about her own agency.

Following the theories of Gayle S. Rubin, this scene also initiates Bulbbul into the "Charmed Circle" of sanctioned sexuality. By being dressed as a bride, she is moved from the status of an autonomous child into a category that is "reducible to sexual intercourse" and procreation within the marital bond. Her internal "coherence" is forced through this ritual, where her lust and arousal are expected to be functions of her relationship with her much older husband, Indranil.

However, as your abstract suggests, this "intelligibility" eventually fails. The "twisted feet" that later define her as the *Chudail* represent the "subversive matrices of gender disorder" that Butler speaks of. By the end of the film, the very symbols that made her a "coherent" bride (the red color, the jewelry, the feet) are re-appropriated to destroy the patriarchs who placed them there. This marks the transition from the suppression found in the "Bhadrakok" household to the subversion that defines New Indian Cinema.

"Complaint Box Cinema" serves as a vital bridge between the historical realism of Parallel Cinema and the radical subversion of the New Indian Wave. It identifies a genre of storytelling that does not merely document suffering but "lodges a protest" against systemic patriarchal violence. This term refers to a subset of feminist narratives that act as a public ledger for the private atrocities committed within the domestic sphere. These films move the "complaint"—traditionally whispered in kitchens or suppressed behind veils—into the high-visibility arena of the cinematic screen. While Parallel Cinema pioneers like Satyajit Ray or Shyam Benegal opened the "box" to show the audience the reality of women's lives, contemporary "Complaint Box Cinema" like *Bulbbul* goes a step further by demanding a reckoning.

The primary function of this cinema is the transition from victimhood to testimony. In *Ankur*, the "complaint" is tragic and silent; Lakshmi's suffering is a testament to the crushing weight of caste and gender, but the narrative ends in a state of unresolved disenfranchisement. However, in *Bulbbul*, the narrative functions as a radical re-presentation of systemic trauma. By labeling the film as a "complaint box," we acknowledge that the story is a response to the "millions of houses" where women face invisible oppressions. The film uses the Gothic genre to amplify these complaints, turning the "twisted feet" and the "broken nest" into tangible evidence of a crime committed by the Bhadrakalok patriarchy, moving the character from a site of pity to a site of power.

Furthermore, this genre is instrumental in dismantling the taboos associated with female interiority and the "regulatory aims" of society described by Judith Butler. Traditionally, women in Indian cinema were expected to be "stoic sufferers," but Complaint Box Cinema breaks this code of silence by validating the "spectres of discontinuity" that patriarchal norms seek to prohibit. When *Bulbbul* transforms into the *Chudail*, she becomes the personification of the complaint itself—a physical manifestation of the suppressed identities (daughter, bride, sister-in-law) that have been violated. As noted in the works of Nayar (2008), this form of representation reveals the "distortions" of the patriarchal mirror and allows the female subject to negotiate a new social space, transforming the "brokenness" of the past into a weapon for contemporary liberation.

Representation of Changing Relationships in New Indian Cinema: A Comparative Study of *Ankur* and *Bulbbul*

While *Ankur* (1974) and *Bulbbul* (2020) are separated by nearly half a century, they are inextricably linked through their interrogation of power, gender, and the female body. *Ankur* offers a stark portrayal of Lakshmi, a Dalit woman navigating the intersections of caste and gender, whereas *Bulbbul* presents the transformation of a child bride within the aristocratic *Bhadrakalok* class. Despite these differing socio-economic contexts, both films serve as critical landmarks in the evolution of feminist cinema in India, illustrating a shift from the passive endurance of Parallel Cinema to the subversive agency of the New Indian Wave.

Applying Laura Mulvey's Theory of the Male Gaze, one observes that while Shyam Benegal avoids the overt eroticization of Lakshmi in *Ankur*, the narrative remains tethered to male desire and agency. Lakshmi is primarily a subject acted upon; her life is shaped by the whims of the landlord, Surya. In contrast, Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* establishes an "oppositional gaze," reclaiming the female body from the lens of victimhood. Through the framework of Barbara Creed's Feminist New Wave, the film transcends traditional horror tropes, positioning the protagonist's violence not as a "monstrous" act, but as an essential agency for emancipation.

The divergence in the protagonists' trajectories is most evident in their respective endings. *Ankur* concludes on a note of realism and pessimism: the character Kishtaya—representative of both disability and lower-caste vulnerability—is brutally beaten by his landowner. Here, the "agency of power" (Foucault) remains concentrated in the hands of the upper-caste, educated Surya, leaving the marginalized characters disenfranchised. *Bulbbul*, however, rejects this stagnation. Although the protagonist is subjected to the ultimate patriarchal violence—rape—she refuses the role of the perpetual victim. While she embodies the site of castration anxiety (Silverman) for the men who fear her, she simultaneously emerges as a "Resisting Force."

Ultimately, the transition from *Ankur* to *Bulbbul* maps a profound metamorphosis in Indian cinema. It marks a journey from suppression to subversion, where the realistic portrayal of systemic oppression in Parallel Cinema has evolved into a Post-Parallel aesthetic of empowerment, where the female subject finally seizes the tools of her own liberation.

Symbolism: A Comparative Perspective on *Charulata* and *Bulbbul*

The concept of symbolism in cinema functions through two distinct connotations. While it historically refers to the nineteenth-century literary movement—emphasizing "art for art's sake"—it simultaneously serves as a semiotic tool where complex, abstract ideas are distilled into evocative, simple images (Gill and Angosto-Ferrandez 431). In the context of Indian Parallel Cinema, Satyajit Ray utilized symbolism to navigate the internal landscape of the "New Woman" of the 1880s. His film *Charulata* (1964), based on Tagore's *Nastanirh*, provides the foundational grammar for the "lonely wife" trope, which Anvita Dutt subsequently subverts in *Bulbbul* (2020). Dutt's adaptation offers an "alternative gaze," acting as a means of prolonging and transforming the pleasure of the original representation (Ellis).

The titles themselves serve as the first layer of symbolism. In *Charulata*, "Charu" (beautiful) is paired with "Lata" (creeper), a name that carries connotations of entanglement and dependency. Charu is the "Lonely Wife" of Bhupati—a name translating to "Lord of Wealth"—whose status as a member of the Bhadrakok elite dictates the rigid, intellectual cage Charu inhabits. Similarly, the Swing Scene in both films acts as a pivotal symbolic site. In *Charulata*, the swing represents a transient release from domestic confinement and a physical manifestation of her latent desire for Amal. In *Bulbbul*, a similar garden scene featuring Indranil, Mahendra, and Satyajeeet echoes this aesthetic, yet serves to highlight the impending fracture of the family unit.

Ray utilizes the binocular as a powerful signifier of Charu's world. It is the medium through which she perceives a reality she cannot inhabit; a "gateway" through which both sunlight and storms enter. The binocular symbolizes her role as a non-judgmental observer of a world that constantly judges her. This

visual "distancing" reflects her repressed desires—a state often mischaracterized in nineteenth-century literature (like *The Yellow Wallpaper*) as hysteria or mental illness (Freud).

Furthermore, the cinematography of the domestic space reinforces patriarchal dominance. In scenes where Bhupati dines, the camera focuses almost exclusively on his face, relegating Charu to the background or shooting her from behind. This "geography of the camera" emphasizes that only the male perspective holds value in the Bhadrlok household. Charu is denied a "front-facing" identity, symbolizing her negotiation of a life where she has no social space to claim.

Anvita Dutt moves this discourse forward by shifting the narrative focus. While *Charulata* ends with a "Broken Nest" and the lingering pain of Amal's departure, *Bulbbul* picks up the narrative after the "Amal figure" (Satyajit) leaves. Dutt transforms the "écriture feminine"—the feminine writing—that begins in *Charulata* into a full-scale reclamation of agency. In *Bulbbul*, the symbols of confinement (the blood-red interior, the ornate jewelry, the "twisted feet") are no longer just markers of tragedy as they were in Ray's realism. Instead, they become symbols of a radical change, where the female subject no longer looks through binoculars at a world she cannot touch, but instead burns down the cage to create a new, albeit violent, social order.

The Bhadrlok Hierarchy and the Politics of Disability

The transition from *Ankur* to *Bulbbul* also marks a shift in the setting of oppression, moving from the rural agrarian conflict of Telangana to the stifling domesticity of the Bengali Bhadrlok class. In *Bulbbul*, the aristocratic manor acts as a "gilded cage" where the performance of gender is strictly monitored. Unlike the overt, physical labor-based oppression of Lakshmi in *Ankur*, *Bulbbul*'s subjugation is psychological and structural, rooted in the preservation of family honor and the "refined" status of the male elite. However, the film subverts this class status by revealing the monstrous violence hidden behind the Bhadrlok's sophisticated veneer, specifically through the characters of Indranil and Mahendra.

This shift in class setting is mirrored by a significant evolution in the portrayal of disability and the "broken body." In *Ankur*, the character of Kishtaya (the protagonist's husband) represents disability as a site of ultimate vulnerability. His inability to speak or defend himself renders him a passive victim of the landowner's "agency of power." Within the realist framework of Parallel Cinema, his disability serves as a metaphor for the socio-economic paralysis of the Dalit community under the feudal gaze. He is a character whom the audience is meant to pity, emphasizing the tragedy of the disenfranchised.

In contrast, *Bulbbul* re-imagines disability through the lens of Post-Parallel Gothic horror. Following her brutal assault, *Bulbbul*'s feet are shattered—a physical marking of her "castration" by patriarchy. However, rather than remaining a site of pity like Kishtaya, her broken body becomes the foundation

of her metamorphosis into the *Chudail* (demon-woman). Her "twisted feet," a traditional mark of the monstrous in Indian folklore, are reclaimed as a symbol of subversion. Using Kaja Silverman's framework, we see that while the men view her injuries as a loss of function, *Bulbbul* repurposes this physical trauma into a "Resisting Force."

Thus, while *Ankur* uses disability to highlight the crushing weight of reality, *Bulbbul* utilizes it to facilitate mythic retribution. This transition highlights the core of your thesis: New Indian Cinema no longer seeks merely to document the "brokenness" of the marginalized, but rather to explore how that brokenness can be transformed into a weapon for dismantling patriarchal structures.

Social Repositioning of Women in Contemporary Narratives: The Role of Clean Slate Filmz

The mantra of Clean Slate Filmz—"Stories enchant us, inspire us, but most of all, they define us"—serves as a mission statement for the social repositioning of women in contemporary Indian media. Founded by Anushka Sharma and Karnesh Sharma, this production house has become a cornerstone of the "Post-Parallel" movement, consistently producing narratives that center on the female experience. From the gritty survivalism of *NH10* and the supernatural subversions of *Pari* and *Bulbbul*, to the psychological depth of *Qala* and *Mai: A Mother's Rage*, the studio's filmography represents a concerted effort to dismantle traditional tropes. Even upcoming projects like *Chakda 'Xpress*—which chronicles Jhulan Goswami's ascent through the "misogynistic politics" of Indian cricket—highlight the studio's commitment to stories of systemic defiance (Clean Slate Filmz).

By intentionally moving away from the "male gaze," Clean Slate Filmz utilizes cinema not merely as a mode of entertainment, but as a platform for socio-cultural influence. This approach aligns with the "Mirror Theory" of art, where cinema acts as a reflection of—and a challenge to—societal realities. A pivotal aspect of this repositioning is the studio's practice of providing "creative agency" to debutant directors, such as Anvita Dutt Guptan. While Dutt's career was initially shaped by the commercial frameworks of Yash Raj Films, her transition to director under Clean Slate Filmz allowed her to explore the "Feminist New Wave" aesthetic that characterizes *Bulbbul*.

Furthermore, the industrial politics of gender play a significant role in this narrative of repositioning. Anushka Sharma has frequently noted in interviews that the availability of opportunities for women in the film industry remains disproportionately low due to entrenched patriarchal structures. By prioritizing talent irrespective of gender and societal biases, the production house seeks to create a more equitable creative ecosystem. This industrial shift is the necessary precursor to the "subversion" discussed in this paper; for a film like *Bulbbul* to dismantle societal taboos on screen, there must first be a production framework willing to challenge the patriarchal gatekeeping of the film industry itself.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the comprehensive theoretical synthesis employed, this research acknowledges certain limitations. First, while the study utilizes a predominantly Western psychoanalytic and feminist framework (Mulvey, Butler, Creed) to deconstruct the film, there remains an inherent tension in applying these "universalizing" theories to the specific socio-historical nuances of late 19th-century Bengal—the period in which the film is set. Although postcolonial perspectives (Chatterjee, Nayar) are used to bridge this gap, the reliance on Eurocentric models of the "gaze" and "performativity" may overlook localized indigenous modes of spectatorial pleasure or folk-traditions unique to Indian gothic storytelling.

Furthermore, the focus on the realist aesthetic's displacement prioritizes a textual and ideological analysis over a broader industrial or audience-reception study. Finally, as *Bulbbul* is a high-budget digital platform release, the findings are limited to the Feminist New Wave within the streaming era, and may not reflect the representational dynamics or "agencies of power" (Foucault) still prevalent in mainstream, mass-market theatrical Bollywood productions.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this paper illustrates how the evolution of Indian cinema moves from the rigid, observational realism established in the late 1940s toward a contemporary landscape where the female body acts as the primary site of ideological warfare. By tracing the journey from the modernist critiques of the mid-twentieth century to the contemporary 'displacement' of the realist aesthetic, the analysis reveals that *Bulbbul* does not merely depict domestic oppression, but actively dismantles it through a reclamation of the gaze and the voice. Through the lenses of gender performativity and sexual hierarchies, the research demonstrates that the protagonist's transition from a regulated 'child-bride' to a sovereign supernatural entity subverts the traditional domestic domains and the 'traffic' of women that once defined the national-popular. By prolonging and transforming the visual pleasure of the original representation within an overarching agency of power, the film repositioning the 'monstrous' and the 'disabled' not as objects of pity or horror, but as agents of postcolonial feminist resistance.

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