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This essay looks at *Jhanak Jhanak Payal BaaJe* (1955; hereafter *JJPB*), and *Geet Gaya Pattharon Ne* (1964; hereafter *GGPN*), both made by the legendary Indian filmmaker, Rajaram Vankudre Shantaram (1901–90; generally known as V. Shantaram). These two commercial films are both based on the male protagonist's artistic talents, supported by their female counterparts' heroic sacrifices. We introduce and then analyze their plots, using Nussbaum's concept of objectification—personal relationships involving a constant struggle over freedom as one either treats others as objects (so undermining their freedom) or allows them to be treated by others as an object (undermining their own freedom). Either way, someone's freedom is compromised. The films demonstrate how the female protagonists are expected to sacrifice their careers and lives for their partners—a theme first broached with the role of Sita in the *Rāmāyana* more than two millennia ago.

A VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A DANCER'S SACRIFICE IN *JHANAK JHANAK PAYAL BAAJE*

Although well-known for earlier black-and-white films, Shantaram achieved his highest financial and critical success in 1955 with *JJPB*, India's first Technicolor film. Its plot revolves around the love affair between the male dancer, Girdhar, and his partner, Neela. Their relationship evolves while Girdhar is preparing to win a national dance contest for the title of *Bharat Natraj* (Dance King of India). Girdhar's father held that same title earlier and is keen to continue the lineage. Neela, enthralled by Girdhar's performance, requests his father to take her also under his tutelage, promising to dedicate her life to dancing and renouncing worldly pleasures. While accompanying Girdhar for a duet, their romance starts developing despite her promise to the guru. In his efforts to prevent any distraction for Girdhar from gaining the coveted national title, his father furiously accuses Neela of betrayal and breaking her vows. Neela is deeply hurt and so willingly decides to leave Girdhar and not hinder him from his aim. She even tries to commit suicide but is rescued by an

ascetic. She adopts a lifestyle like that of the 16th-century female saint Mirabai (Lutgendorf 2012), who renounced her home and family. Girdhar is goaded by his father to take another former student to be his partner in the competition. Neela, genuinely in love with Girdhar, but now an ascetic, prays for his victory. On the day of the competition, the villain bribes the new student to make Girdhar lose the competition. However, in the climax the heroine Neela rejoins him and performs the Shiv Parvati dance with her partner. Together they win the competition. After Girdhar's victory she decides to leave again, her goal accomplished. But Girdhar's father stops her, realizing Neela's hardships, and reunites the two lovers through their marriage (*Editor's note*). It is worth recalling that Sandhya, who played Neela, was the mother of another star, Jayalalitha Jayaram: she appeared in many films—in three languages—mostly with the Tamil megastar M.G. Ramachandran (1917–87), whom she married. Both of them ultimately became, in succession, Chief Ministers of Tamilnadu. Your Editor once encountered M.G.R. right outside Egmore Railway Station in Madras, mounted on a white stallion and haranguing a small cowd!)

Gregory Booth (2005) has criticized the film for its communal bias against Muslims, which Jain responded to by an alternative analysis (2011). Like the comments by Bakhle (2005), Lutgendorf (2012) criticized this film's plot for its nationalistic and patriarchal biases: the heroine being forced to sacrifice personally for her male partner's ambition, and for the sake of the great tradition of Indian classical music, which demands dedication based on austerities. Jain (2010) has surveyed a few distinct shades of renunciation in Hindi films, but most are based on a male protagonist's sacrifice for his spiritual or nationalistic or social cause, and not for a female partner. Although *JJPB* does portray the asceticism of the female protagonist, her goal is neither spiritual nor socio-political but for worldly success (Lutgendorf 2012).

A VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A WIFE'S SACRIFICE IN *GEET GAYA PATTHARON NE*

Ramlal, a wealthy man, loses his little daughter when the maidservant kidnaps her. Ramlal continues his search for the child for years, although he is not aware whether she is being raised as a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or a Bengali, Maharashtrian, Tamil, or Kashmiri. So, he decides to build a house that would represent the culture of different Indian religious communities and regions. He asks his friend to search for an architect to design such a house. Vijay, the protagonist, belongs to a family of sculptors and is qualified in the required skill. As he grows up, he loses interest in sculpting and instead works as a local guide around an ancient rock-cut cave complex. Against his wishes, his father wants him to work as a sculptor, to continue the lineage (reminding us of the first film, *JJPB*). While showing the cave complex to a group of girls, Vijay meets the female protagonist, Vidya (played in the film by Shantaram's own daughter, Rajshree). Entranced by her beauty, he carves her image on a rock in different forms and shapes. Soon the two prepare to marry, but several hurdles are in their way. Vijay's father disapproves of Vidya and the marriage as he

93 wants Vijay to excel in sculpting. Also Vidya learns that her mother was sell-
94 ing her for cash to a rich fellow. Eventually, Vijay's uncle helps the two lovers
95 to get married.

96 Meanwhile, Ramlal's assistant finds Vijay and hires him to build the dream
97 house reflecting India's diverse cultures. After Vijay leaves, Vidya gives birth
98 to their son and is taken away by her mother and the rich man she was sold
99 to. On returning, Vijay misunderstands Vidya, abandons her and his child, and
100 leaves again to complete his work. Vidya secretly follows Vijay and starts
101 working as a chef in the same house, hiding her face under a veil. For years,
102 Vijay remains unaware of Vidya's identity. Impressed by her demeanor he
103 approaches her to become a model for the statue he is making, as he considers
104 her the ideal model for an Indian woman. Eventually when Vidya's face is
105 unveiled, he is disappointed to see her again. However, during the opening
106 ceremony of the newly built house, Vijay is surprised to see the woman's
107 prominent statue completed by their son, about whom Vijay has been unaware
108 so far. Vijay's father comes and clears up Vijay's misunderstanding about
109 Vidya, who finally reunites with her father, Ramlal. Thus, the film ends hap-
110 pily, heralding the emotional reunion of the father with his daughter and the
111 husband with his wife.

112 113 114 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO FILMS

115
116 These movies both feature instances of women brought up in patriarchal
117 homes. They serve and ultimately surrender to the senior male authority and
118 the nationalistic project without even a hint of any challenge to male domi-
119 nation. In both movies women have not been "visible" in society and are treated
120 rather like objects: objectified and expected to look their best, provide comfort,
121 and extend compassion to everyone around them. Kant's notion of the human-
122 ity of treating an individual as an end and never reaching certain ends has
123 been the epigraph used to criticize social injustices against women everywhere.
124 Martha Nussbaum (2000) has listed seven notions that need to be considered
125 here. First, the individual treats another as the instrument of their purposes.
126 Secondly, the individual treats another as deficient in autonomy and self-
127 determination. Thirdly, the individual treats another as inert and devoid of
128 agency. Fourthly, the individual treats another as an object interchangeable
129 with other objects. Fifthly, the individual treats another as lacking integrity, as
130 someone one may break apart. Sixthly, an individual treats another as someone
131 who can be sold or bought as an object. Finally, the individual treats another
132 as someone whose feelings, desires and reason need not be considered. These
133 notions form the backdrop of women's lives at all stages of life concerning
134 their desires of playing, education, marriage, childbearing, and family life gen-
135 erally. Male individuals do not consider the feelings, desires or experiences of
136 the women in these films. Thus, the women are portrayed as devoid of any
137 authority to choose the kind of life they want to live; for it is assumed that
138 they must sacrifice to fulfill the desires of others. Women must leave the crit-
139 ical decisions of their lives to the family patriarch.

The term “objectification” commands women’s lives, and is commonly applied to advertisements, films, and other representations where women are indeed shown as mere objects. This attitude and approach toward women undermine their integrity and their dignity. We can envision how personal relationships are related to women’s objectification, which Nussbaum discusses in her list of notions that must be considered when talking about objectification. Nussbaum’s list aptly applies to the struggle the heroines faced in the films because of the patriarchal setup. According to Roop Rekha Verma, a scholar and activist, there are many ways in which Indian religious traditions have devalued women through the ages; and she concludes that the significant problem in these traditions is that they deprive women of “full personhood.” Nussbaum considers three things essential for personhood: autonomy, self-respect, and a sense of fulfillment and achievement. This is precisely what we can observe in the films.

This dehumanization and objectification of women, it is evident, is not just sexual, nor is its primary vehicle just sexual objectification. We can observe in both films that it is also the domination of the men and the lack of personhood that leads to women’s objectification. We are reminded that there is here a sinister objectification without any connection to sexual objectification. The instrumental treatment of women, treating them as tools for a purpose, is always morally problematic. Denial of autonomy and denial of subjectivity are objectionable if they persist throughout an adult relationship as we witness in both films.

It may be interesting to compare our present arguments with our recent review of two other Hindi films, *Anupama* (1966) and *Anuradha* (1960), in an earlier article (Bhasin and Jain 2021). The legendary filmmaker who made those two films was from Bengal, the region that produced many of India’s pioneering progressive and liberal leaders, including the noted director Satyajit Roy. These liberal ideas about women are reflected in their films as well. However, V. Shantaram, who was a Marathi and not from Bengal, embraces stereotypical ideas about women as being temptresses and distractions for legendary artists and ascetics — a theme that we also find in a few other Hindi films, such as *Baiju Bawra* (1952), *Basant Bahar* (1956) and *Sur Sangam* (1985). It is notable that most of these films have been commercially very successful and popular with audiences, suggesting that the Indian public appreciated the gender roles as presented in these films.

We might add that both films under discussion are tributes to Classical music, a frequent feature of V. Shantaram’s later movies. Here we find several sparkling dance ensembles of the Kathak, Manipuri, Tandava, and Bharata Natyam styles (Raheja 2002). Other strong points of the films are their lyrics and musical score (Bali 2011). The songs are based on melodies from Classical music. In the first film, *JJPB*, the title song is based on *rāga* Adana, a rare rendering by the legendary singer Amir Khan; *Mere ae dil* and *Jo tum todo* are based on *rāga* Bhairavi; *Sainya jao mose* on *rāga* Des, and *Nain so nain* on *rāga* Malgunji. In the second film, *GGPN*, the title song is based on *rāga* Durga, a rare rendering by another legendary singer, Kishori Amonkar. Another song

187 in the second film *Tere khayalo me* is based on *rāga* Brindavani Sarang
188 and others.

191 CONCLUSION

192 The plots of the two films center on the struggle faced by the female protagon-
193 ists, a theme that had first been broached with the role of Sita in the epic
194 *Rāmāyana* over two thousand years ago. In the first film, *JJPB* (1955), the hero-
195 ine leaves her lover because she is blamed for distracting him from winning
196 the competition, and she then experiences repudiation by her guru. She loses
197 her freedom and subjectivity as an individual, and her relationship with the
198 other becomes hell for her. In the second film, *GGPN* (1964), the female protag-
199 onist is abandoned by her husband after experiencing similar treatment.
200 Ideally, we should not lose our freedom and subjectivity when we relate, since
201 autonomy, dignity and subjectivity are significant in every aspect of life. To
202 lead a life as an authentic being, one should not be overly dependent on the
203 opinions of another and be courageous enough to decide for oneself.
204 Nussbaum's forms of objectification are persistent, and we can see this reality
205 in the plots of both these films.
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