

# Exploring Feminist Themes in Film: A Comparative Analysis of *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*

**Neha Paliwal**

## **Abstract**

This article explores feminist themes in the films *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* through a comparative analysis. Both films are based on real events and provide powerful narratives about women's struggles within patriarchal societies. By examining these films, this study uncovers underlying feminist motifs, analyses the portrayal of gender dynamics, and explores the ways in which the characters challenge traditional norms and expectations. The methodology involves an examination of the films' plotlines, character development, and techniques, supplemented by a critical analysis of the social and cultural contexts in which these films were produced. Various aspects of feminism in film, such as women's agency, empowerment, resistance against oppression, and the intersectionality of gender with other social factors, are highlighted. The findings contribute to knowledge of feminist representations in cinema, emphasizing the significance of film as a medium for challenging and transforming societal norms, facilitating discussion on the representation of feminism in contemporary culture, and also promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

**Keywords:** gender equity, resistance, women, empowerment, feminist film

## **Introduction**

Feminist themes have been significant in cinema for decades, highlighting the struggles, challenges, and achievements of women in society. The representation of women in film has evolved, reflecting changed social, cultural, and political landscapes. Feminist filmmakers have challenged gender norms, addressed gender inequality, and explored women's lives:

Feminist Film Theory is a theory that discourses about women's participations and roles in almost every field in the community and in the society in general. In this modern world, women are not only limited on one single field of expertise. In every turn, the presences of women are extensively felt. May it be in politics, in Dramas, in science, in Literature, in Arts, in Politics, in the Governance and even in Films.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1970s feminist film theory, with the vision of representing cinema as a cultural practice to recreate and represent the myths about women and femininity, emerged. The development of theoretical approaches and critical discussions about the image of women as

---

Neha Paliwal is an Assistant Professor at Department of English, Chandigarh University. Email: neha.e11123@cumail.in.

<sup>1</sup> "Feminist Film Theory," *Filmtheory.org* (2014). At: [www.filmtheory.org/feminist-film-theory](http://www.filmtheory.org/feminist-film-theory).

portrayed in film and society flourished. Classical cinema was criticized for the representation of women in stereotypical manner, and for making films which that did not give space to female desires, female subjectivity and female existence. The sexist depictions of women in classic Hollywood films were the target of early feminist critique in the 1960s. Women were frequently represented as submissive sex objects or as examples of gender stereotypes. Such repetitive images of women were seen to be unacceptable reality distortions that were harmful to the female viewer. Changing sexist practices and promoting positive depictions of women in film were demands made by feminists. With the rise of poststructuralism, it became clear that representations of women in favourable light were insufficient to alter the fundamental structures of the film industry. A greater understanding of cinema's destructive patterns was necessary given its history of sexualized gender stereotypes and brutality against women.

Feminist cinema theory, influenced by a poststructuralist viewpoint, advanced beyond interpreting a picture to examine the intricate mechanisms involved; the primary contention is gender, or sexual difference, is crucial to the meaning-making process in films. Feminist film theory asserts that, rather than merely reflecting social connections, cinema actively develops the meanings of sexual difference and sexuality. It does this by drawing on analytical tools from Marxist criticism of ideology, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. Psychoanalysis dominated feminist film theory through the late 1980s, resulting in insightful interpretations of various Hollywood genres, including melodrama, film noir, horror, science fiction, and action films. Anneke Smelik states,

In the 1990s feminist film theory moved away from a binary understanding of sexual difference to multiple perspectives, hybrid identities, and possible spectatorships. This resulted in an increasing concern with questions of ethnicity, masculinity, and queer sexualities. In the first decade of 2000 feminist film theory made room for new theoretical approaches, ranging from performance studies and phenomenology to Deleuzian studies. Feminist film theory was highly influential in the 1970s and 1980s, making a lasting impact on the wider fields of visual culture and cultural studies, especially with the study of woman-as-image and the male gaze.<sup>2</sup>

The resistance against patriarchal norms is a central theme in feminist cinema, as it challenges and subverts the oppressive power structures that restrict women's autonomy and agency. In the films *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*, the protagonists confront and resist patriarchal norms in different contexts, showcasing the strength and determination of women to assert their rights and challenge societal expectations.

*Provoked* is a 2006 British drama film directed by Jag Mundhra. It is based on the true story of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, played by Indian actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan; an Indian woman living in the United Kingdom who was convicted of killing her abusive husband. The film depicts her journey of resistance and eventual empowerment. The film explores the themes of domestic

---

<sup>2</sup> Anneke Smelik, "Feminist Film Theory," in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Nancy A. Naples (Online: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), pp. 1–5.

violence, female empowerment, and the legal system's response to abuse against women. *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* is a 2023 Indian-Norwegian film directed by Ashima Chibber. It features the real story of Sagarika Chakraborty, played by Indian actor Rani Mukharjee with the screen name Debika Chatterjee; an Indian woman who fights a legal battle against the Norwegian Child Welfare Services to regain custody of her two children. The film celebrates Debika's relentless pursuit of justice and her refusal to be silenced. The film explores the themes of cultural identity, motherhood, and the complexities of international law.

Feminist frameworks help us to examine how the films *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* address feminist concerns. It allows us to analyze the representation of women in these films, their agency, and the power dynamics at play within the narratives. By applying feminist film themes, we can critically evaluate the films' engagement with feminist themes and their potential to challenge or reinforce existing gender norms. By examining these films side by side, we aim to understand how they address issues such as gender-based violence, women's agency, cultural barriers, and legal challenges faced by women. This comparative analysis will involve an examination of the narratives, characters, and visual styles employed in the films. Exploring how each film portrays the experiences of the female protagonists, their struggles for justice and empowerment, and the broader societal implications depicted within their respective contexts. By studying these films together, we hope to gain insights into the diverse ways in which feminist themes are approached in cinema, and how different cultural perspectives influence the portrayal of women's issues. The analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of gender, culture, and legal systems, and shed light on the effectiveness of cinematic storytelling in raising awareness about feminist concerns. Garcia Moreno aptly states, "Violence against women is a complex social problem, and our knowledge on how to address it is evolving."<sup>3</sup>

There has been extensive research on feminist themes in film, analyzing various aspects of gender representation, feminist aesthetics, and the socio-political impact of feminist films. Previous studies have explored the ways in which feminist filmmakers subvert traditional narratives, challenge patriarchal structures, and advocate for social change. Others have examined the role of women behind the camera as directors, writers, and producers, and their contributions to feminist filmmaking. Additionally, researchers have explored the reception and interpretation of feminist films, investigating how audiences engage with and make meaning from these cinematic narratives. Patricia Frens asserts that, "issues in Feminist Film Criticism brings together a wide variety of writings by Anglo American feminist film scholars, focusing on issues applicable to a large body of film or to filmmaking practice in general. Where analyses of individual works appear, they represent essays whose main concerns are theoretical."<sup>4</sup>

While there is a substantial literature on feminist themes in film, comparative analysis of *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* is limited. This research contributes to existing knowledge by conducting a comparative analysis of the films, exploring their approaches to

---

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Garcia-Moreno, Lori Heise, Henrica A.F.M. Jansen, Mary Ellsberg, and Charlotte Watts, "Violence against Women," *Science*, vol. 310, no. 5752 (2005), pp. 1282–83.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Erens, *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

feminist storytelling, and identifying common themes and divergent perspectives.

### **Film Analysis: *Provoked***

*Provoked* is based on the true story of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, an Indian woman living in the United Kingdom who faced severe domestic violence. The film follows Kiranjit's journey as she endures years of abuse from her husband and eventually killed him in a fit of desperation. Kiranjit is arrested and charged with murder, leading to a high-profile trial that raises questions about the legal system's understanding of the complexities of domestic violence. Dialogues from the film *Provoked* give a clear description of the plotline. Kiranjit Ahluwalia, played by Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, exclaimed, "I was silenced, humiliated, and beaten every day. But I couldn't speak up because I was afraid."<sup>5</sup> In another scene, Veronica Scott, played by Miranda Richardson, states the complexity and limitation of the legal system, "You can't expect the court to understand the nuances of domestic abuse."<sup>6</sup> This dialogue highlights the silence and fear that often accompany domestic violence. It emphasizes the power dynamics within an abusive relationship, where the victim is coerced into silence, and captures the experiences of many women who suffer in silence due to the fear of repercussions, showcasing the importance of giving voice to their stories.

### **Exploration of women's agency and empowerment**

*Provoked* examines feminist themes surrounding women's agency and empowerment, particularly in the context of domestic violence. *New York Times* reporter, Jeannette Catsoulis, writes "The film emphasizes Kiranjit Ahluwalia's journey towards reclaiming her agency and finding empowerment despite enduring years of abuse. A landmark case in British law, Ms Ahluwalia's successful 1992 appeal helped widen the legal options available to victims of long-term abuse, yet *Provoked* could hardly be less provocative."<sup>7</sup> Through Kiranjit's character, the film highlights the importance of self-empowerment and the potential for women to assert their rights and break free from abusive relationships. It emphasizes the significance of providing support, resources, and legal frameworks that enable women to exercise their agency and seek justice:

There are also spirited scenes in the prison especially that moment when Kiran unbuttons her sympathetic cellmate's blouse to create a better effect at an interview and whispers bosoms (82:77-82:78), in reference to a reading class where Kiran has stumbled over that word (66:74-67:48). But of course, the allusion underlines her contribution to the effort towards feminine empowerment.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Jag Mundhra, *Provoked* (Raj Film Productions, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Mundhra, *Provoked*, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Jeannette Catsoulis, "Revisiting the True Story of a Battered Wife's Revenge," *The New York Times*, 11 May (2007). At: [www.nytimes.com/2007/05/11/movies/11Prov.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/11/movies/11Prov.html).

<sup>8</sup> Shivani Vashist, "Unsilencing the Silence: Kiran in Movie *Provoked*," *Research Scholar*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2013).

Kiranjit's appearance also changes throughout the film along with her evolving character, In the beginning she was seen wearing salwar kameez and dupatta with a Mangalsutra around her neck, depicting her domesticated and bounded married life. Then, the prisoner's uniform in the prison gave her a strong image as shown in the scenes where she is pressing clothes and earning money by doing different tasks inside the prison. She could be seen as a strong woman tackling challenges:

In the movie *Provoked*, we find Kiran in jail surprises her lawyer when she tells her she's at least free there; and she doesn't fight at first at first, convinced she's guilty and sinful. I sinned; I must pay (47:37-47:49). Radha: How do you feel in here (jail)? Are they treating you well? Kiran: I feel free (34:56-35:12).<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the film, she is seen with short hair, in a trim skirt and blazer with formal shoes, as an emancipated, powerful woman who is the mistress of her own life (1:29:56-1:30:28). Her appearance adds to the empowerment and freedom attained by her in the prison in and out.

### **Examination of Resistance Against Patriarchal Norms**

The film confronts the deeply entrenched societal expectations and norms that perpetuate gender-based violence. Kiranjit's act of killing her abusive husband becomes a powerful form of resistance against the oppressive patriarchal structures that had silenced and oppressed her. Modleski states that, "Feminine sexuality must undergo a complete suppression, feminine desire, an utter silencing, so there is nothing left for the feminist critic to do but outline the process by which this silencing is inscribed in the text."<sup>10</sup> Amar Nath writes,

Marriage is said to be deepest as well as most problematic of all human relations. Religiously, marriage is supposed to be the holy union of two souls and bodies. Amongst Hindus, the wife is known as 'Ardhangini' or 'sahadharmini', terms which emphasize her equality and 'oneness' with husband. Despite the idealized concept of marriage, woman in reality is essentially a subservient partner in marriage.<sup>11</sup>

The film challenges the victim-blaming mentality often associated with cases of domestic violence and presents Kiranjit as a survivor who fights back against her abuser. It raises awareness about the need to address the root causes of domestic violence and to challenge the prevailing narrative that blames the victims rather than holding the perpetrators accountable. According to Shivani, "Provoked is a denunciation of male domestic violence. We find the depiction of the male-dominated society, where Kiran finds herself in a precarious situation bearing the brunt of Deepak's frustration. The domineering Deepak is both attracted physically to his wife and beats her when she doesn't fulfill his needs". (67:81-69:38)."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Vashist, "Unsilencing the Silence: Kiran in Movie *Provoked*".

<sup>10</sup> Tania Modleski, "Never to Be Thirty-six Years Old...Rebecca as Female Oedipal Drama," *Wide Angle*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1982), pp. 34-41.

<sup>11</sup> Amar Nath Prasad and S. K. Paul, *Feminism in Indian Writing in English* (Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Vashist, "Unsilencing the Silence: Kiran in Movie *Provoked*".

## Intersectionality and the Portrayal of Race and Class

*Provoked* incorporates an exploration of intersectionality by highlighting the intersection of race, gender, and class in Kiranjit's experiences. As an Indian woman living in the United Kingdom, Kiranjit faces not only the challenges of domestic violence but also the additional complexities arising from her racial and cultural background. In the beginning when Kiranjit was taken to prison, she was unable to speak English well and thus had difficulty in expressing herself. The film addresses the intersectionality of Kiranjit's identity, shedding light on the ways in which race and class influence her experiences of abuse, legal proceedings, and societal perceptions. Nikita Ann Jacob explains that, "intersectional feminism acknowledges the fact that all women do not have the same experiences and identities and Intersectionality examines how these interlocking systems affect the marginalized sections of society. This term was first coined by black feminist scholar and social theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her 1989 paper 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'."<sup>13</sup> Taking this perspective, the film highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique struggles faced by women who navigate multiple layers of oppression. Kiranjit's life runs like a roller coaster from a domestic submissive wife to a murderer. She was supported by Radha Dalal, played by Nandita Das, social activist and leader of a group of South Asian social workers named the Southhall Black Sisters, till the end. The active participation and existence of the Southhall Black Sisters points out the need of sensitive issues, arising from cultural and racial differences stating:

Women victims of domestic violence come from all racial, ethnic, religious, age, and socioeconomic groups. The question most often asked is: 'Why do they stay in violent homes?' Some of the explanations have been compiled by psychologists into a pattern known as the 'battered woman syndrome'. A number of factors mitigate against escape, including an overwhelming fear which immobilizes the victim and 'learned helplessness' which makes women feel they cannot control their lives.<sup>14</sup>

The portrayal of Kiranjit's journey in *Provoked* serves as a commentary on the need for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to feminism, one that acknowledges and addresses the interconnected systems of power and oppression that shape women's lives. Shivani Vashist writes that, "The flashback techniques serve to illustrate the different negative shades to Deepak's character - the possessiveness, the suspicion, the infidelity, the inhumanity, the callousness, his utter lack of respect for Kiran to reduce her to something lesser than even a physical entity. Kiran's entry to the jail is set against her entry to her married home, the latter appearing more despicable

---

<sup>13</sup> Nikita Ann Jacob, "Representation of Intersectionality in the Film *Margarita with A Straw*," *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2021), pp. 37–40.

<sup>14</sup> Frederic Brussat and Mary Ann Brussat, "Provoked: A True Story," *Spirituality and Practice*. At: [www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/16833/provoked-a-true-story](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/16833/provoked-a-true-story).

in contrast to the former.”<sup>15</sup> *Provoked* highlights feminist issues related to women’s agency and empowerment, resistance against patriarchal norms, and intersectionality. By exploring these themes, the film challenges societal perspective and attitudes, raises awareness about domestic violence, and advocates for the empowerment and liberation of women from oppressive structures.

### **Film Analysis: *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway***

*Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* revolves around Debika Chatterjee, an Indian woman living in Norway, who fights against the Norwegian Child Welfare Services to regain custody of her son and five month old daughter. The film explores cultural clashes, the complexities of international law, and the sacrifices a mother made to protect her children. Aniruddha Chatterjee, played by Anirban Bhattacharya, is Debika’s husband. Anirban becomes submissive to the Welfare custodian, ignoring the condition of his wife. Another major character in film is the government lawyer provided by Norwegian court, named, Daniel Singh Ciupek, played by Jim Sarbh. In the script Debika Chatterjee says, “I am his mother. No one can separate a mother from her child!”<sup>16</sup> This dialogue underscores the universal bond between a mother and her child, challenging the actions of the Norwegian Child Welfare Services. It speaks to the deeply ingrained maternal instinct and the inherent right of a mother to be with her child. The dialogue reflects the film's exploration of cultural clashes and the emotional struggle faced by Debika as she fights for her maternal rights, further providing insights into the experiences of the female protagonist, highlighting her struggles, resilience, and determination to fight against oppressive systems.

### **Analysis of Women's Struggles Within a Legal Framework**

In *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*, one of the prominent feminist themes is the depiction of women's struggles within a legal framework. The film highlights the challenges faced by Mrs Chatterjee as she fights against the Norwegian Child Welfare Services to regain custody of her two children. It explores how legal systems can sometimes fail to recognize the nuances of cultural differences and the unique circumstances of immigrant women. Several scenes in the film are heart-wrenching; in the opening scene of the film, Mrs Chatterjee can be seen running behind a van in which staff of the Welfare Service of Norway is stealing away her two children named Shubh and Suchi (five months only) without informing her. The fear-laden mother running behind the van barefoot, asking them to stop and calling the names of her children, is enough to explain the anxiety and fear aroused by the action taken by legal authorities. (Scene time duration 3mins:20secs to 4mins:12secs). Her multiple attempts to meet the children legally failed due to strict laws, resulting in a more anxious, afraid, unpredictable mother, who was forced to behave in unpredictable and violent ways. A scene in public court where Mrs Chatterjee’s case was running, the prosecutor states, “Honored Court, according to the child welfare act 20 of July 1992, number 100, relating

---

<sup>15</sup> Vashist, “Unsilencing the Silence: Kiran in Movie *Provoked*.”

<sup>16</sup> Ashima Chibber (dir.), *Mrs Chatterjee vs. Norway* (Zee Studios, 2023).

to the Child Welfare Services, this couple here is incapable of providing a secure environment to their children. They have been investigated for ten weeks on 24 parameters according to the 4(3) of the above, mentioned act. Through their investigation, our team concluded, that Mrs Chatterjee has an unstable mind, and her behavior is unpredictable.”<sup>17</sup>

In one of the scenes, Mrs Chatterjee cried out helplessly with the act of taking away her children by Welfare department, “In logon ne hamara dunia cheen liya” (These people have snatched away my life).<sup>18</sup> The film portrays Mrs Chatterjee’s journey as she confronts the complexities of international law and encounters barriers in her pursuit of justice. It sheds light on the bureaucratic hurdles, language barriers, and cultural biases that impede her efforts. This feminist theme underscores the need for legal systems to be more sensitive and responsive to the diverse experiences and backgrounds of women.

### **Exploration of cultural clashes and identity issues**

The dynamic of the film narrative is altered by rejecting earlier feminist film theories, particularly the psychoanalytic theories of Laura Mulvey’s masculine gaze and phallogocentric enjoyment in favor of viewing films as cultural texts. The relationship between the feminist film and cultural studies becomes a tool of resistance for many film makers by rejecting earlier positions on women’s cinema. Similarly, Debika Chatterjee, an Indian woman living in Norway, finds herself caught between diverse cultures and experiences loss of identity. The film dives into the conflicts she faces as she tries to navigate the expectations and norms of both Indian and Norwegian societies. The clashes between Indian and Norwegian cultural values are depicted through Debika’s interactions with the Norwegian Child Welfare Services, legal professionals, and her own community. The film highlights the tension between individual rights and collective welfare, and the complexities of cultural integration. Despite being an educated women living in a country like Norway, she was not aware of her own individual rights. Her whole life was restricted to raising her two children and taking care of the house.

The case highlighted differences in cultural norms and child-rearing practices between India and Norway. In Indian culture, extended family involvement and a strong emphasis on familial ties are common. Grandparents often play a significant role in childcare, and the concept of joint family living is prevalent. On the other hand, Norwegian society places a strong emphasis on individual autonomy and the welfare of the child. State intervention in cases where child welfare is deemed at risk is not uncommon. Feeding with hands, a child’s sleeping with parents, and using kohl (kajal or soot) on the eyes or cheeks are common in Indian families, but not in Norway and may be reasons to interfere in the care of child. Another scene highlights the differences of culture clash of upbringing children is mentioned by Mrs Chatterjee’s Lawyer Daniel, “These are the Indian parents and Indian parents have their own way of dealing with their children, general health, food, discipline all are slightly different.... We cannot force them to raise their children the way

---

<sup>17</sup> Chibber, *Mrs Chatterjee vs. Norway*.

<sup>18</sup> Chibber, *Mrs Chatterjee vs. Norway*.



we like to live.” (Scene time duration 47 mins:09 secs to 48mins:01secs)<sup>19</sup> Debika, being an Indian wife and mother became the victim of cultural clash, and her identity was crushed by legal suits claiming her not suitable to bring up her own children.

Through this exploration, the film raises questions about the importance of cultural sensitivity and the recognition of cultural diversity within society. It underscores the need for a feminist lens that acknowledges and respects the intersections of gender, culture, and identity.

### **Representation of Motherhood and Female Solidarity**

Mrs Chatterjee’s fight to regain custody of her children reflects the deep bond between a mother and her children. The film portrays her unwavering love and determination to protect her offspring, despite the adversities she faces: “Throughout the film, Debika has been called ‘mentally unstable,’ ‘incapable mother,’ and an ‘unfit mom.’ Her only fault was that she loved her kids. In the film, there are many moments where Debika’s emotions got the better of her. But no one can argue about her pure intention with it comes to her kids. Rani’s performance in the emotion-heavy scenes is the one for ages!”<sup>20</sup>

In a dialogue with her lawyer, Debika asserts, “I won’t let them take away my child. I am his mother, and I will fight for him till the end.”<sup>21</sup> This dialogue exemplifies her unwavering commitment and determination. It showcases her agency as she challenges the patriarchal notion that a mother’s role is solely limited to caregiving, emphasizing her right to make decisions for her child’s well-being. Mrs Chatterjee’s resistance against societal expectations and her insistence on pursuing her own identity and aspirations are highlighted throughout the film. She confronts the traditional notion that a woman should sacrifice her ambitions for the sake of her children, asserting her individuality and right to self-fulfillment. In one of the dialogues, she asserts the strength of being mother, “Hum achha maa hain bura maa hain pata nahi, par maa hain, maa hoon sir”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the film showcases female solidarity as Debika finds companionship and assistance from other women, both within her community and among the Norwegian professionals who empathize with her situation. This representation highlights the importance of female solidarity and the collective strength that women can draw upon to overcome challenges.

By exploring the feminist themes of women’s struggles, *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* provides a nuanced portrayal of women’s experiences and challenges within a multicultural context. The film encourages viewers to reflect on the complexities of gender, culture, and the legal system, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society.

---

<sup>19</sup> Chibber, *Mrs Chatterjee vs. Norway*.

<sup>20</sup> Shivani, “You Can’t Miss These Moments From *Mrs Chatterjee Vs Norway*,” *Popxo.com*. At: <https://www.popxo.com/article/mrs-chatterjee-vs-norway-movie-review>.

<sup>21</sup> Chibber, *Mrs Chatterjee vs. Norway*

<sup>22</sup> Chibber, *Mrs Chatterjee vs. Norway*

## Common Themes

In both *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* there are common feminist motifs that resonate across the films. First is women's agency: both films highlight the importance of women asserting their agency and taking control of their lives in the face of adversity. Kiranjit in *Provoked* and Debika in *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* demonstrate resilience and determination as they fight against oppressive systems. Second is resistance to injustice: both films depict the protagonists challenging unjust systems and societal norms. Kiranjit resists her abusive husband and fights for justice in the legal system, while Debika battles against cultural biases and the Norwegian Child Welfare Services to protect her child. "We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement."<sup>23</sup> Third is intersectionality: both films explore the intersectionality of gender with other social identities such as race, culture, and class. They shed light on how these intersecting identities shape the experiences and challenges faced by the female protagonists.

## Divergent Thoughts:

In terms of gender dynamics, *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* portray different aspects: *Provoked* focuses on the dynamics of domestic violence and the portrayal of a patriarchal society. It highlights the power imbalances, oppression, and silence experienced by women within abusive relationships. The film exposes the destructive impact of toxic masculinity and the systemic biases that perpetuate gender-based violence. Shivani writes, "Kiran is asked to take off her jewelry and clothes at prison, including her Mangalsutra, a sacred necklace for married woman and her Kara, a traditional Sikh bracelet. She is made to strip her Punjabi clothes for prison rags, right in front of the officer."<sup>24</sup> *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* explores gender dynamics within the context of cultural clashes and legal battles. It shows the challenges faced by immigrant women in asserting their rights in a foreign legal system. It also examines the intersection of cultural norms and gender expectations, emphasizing the importance of understanding and respecting diverse cultures.

*Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* both address feminist issues but take divergent angles. *Provoked* follows Kiranjit's personal journey to empowerment, emphasizing individual agency, while *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* explores these issues within a broader cultural context, highlighting collective action and systemic change. These distinct approaches provide diverse perspectives on challenging traditional norms and provides a wider understanding of feminist themes. Both *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* address feminist concerns, highlighting common motifs such as women's agency, identity issues, resisting injustice, and intersectionality. They differ in their portrayal of gender dynamics and their approaches to challenging traditional norms, contributing to a rich and multifaceted exploration of feminist themes in film.

<sup>23</sup> bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," *Feminist Review*, no. 23 (1986), pp. 125–38.

<sup>24</sup> Vashist, *Unsilencing the Silence: Kiran in Movie Provoked*.

## Conclusion

*Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* offer compelling narratives that explore women's agency and empowerment in distinct contexts. Through the analysis of key dialogues and evidence, we witness the journey of the protagonists as they navigate through adversity, challenge patriarchal norms, and assert their rights. In *Provoked*, Kiranjit's transformation from a victim to a survivor symbolizes her reclamation of agency and her refusal to accept a life of abuse. The film emphasizes the significance of solidarity and collective resistance against oppression. Similarly, *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* portrays a mother's unwavering determination to fight for her child's custody, challenging societal expectations and asserting her individuality. The film questions traditional gender roles and highlights the importance of a woman's pursuit of personal fulfilment. In an interview with ANI, Rani Mukherjee, who played the role of Mrs Chatterjee in film, quoted, "It always feels great to see stories of our Indian women being heard globally. I have always tried my best to take the stories of our Indian women to a global platform. I am an Indian woman and know our powers, So, I always ensure that our stories are heard with my work."<sup>25</sup>

The exploration of women's struggles, their journey towards empowerment, and their ability to challenge patriarchal norms provide valuable insights into the representation of women's agency and empowerment in contemporary cinema. bell hooks writes "If any female feels she need anything beyond herself to legitimate and validate her existence, she is already giving away her power to be self-defining, her agency."<sup>26</sup> Films influenced by feminist theories have sought to provide more nuanced, authentic, and inclusive portrayals of women and marginalized groups. Both films feature strong female protagonists who defy gender stereotypes and traditional notions of femininity and thus gained popularity. *Provoked* and *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway* provide a critical lens through which one can analyze and deconstruct the portrayal of women in society. As we persist in our pursuit of a fairer and more equal society, feminist theory and activism will undoubtedly have a crucial influence on shaping the future dynamics between genders.

---

<sup>25</sup> "Rani Mukerji on *Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway*: Found Its Audience," *ndtv.com*, 22 March (2023). At: [www.ndtv.com/entertainment/i-want-whole-world-to-hear-stories-of-indian-women-rani-mukerji-3881844](http://www.ndtv.com/entertainment/i-want-whole-world-to-hear-stories-of-indian-women-rani-mukerji-3881844).

<sup>26</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).