

Chapter-2

Mothering the Self: Changing Stories, Changing Lives

Mothers at Crossroads

In a poignant TEDxDerryLondonderryWomen talk, titled *Having it All-For Working Mothers Everywhere* Julie Ellison, a barrister in London speaks of her personal experience as a working mother. She feels that for working mothers, more than the social perception, it is the self-perception which makes it difficult to switch between their work and family life: “I have tried to carry out my job as though I don’t have children, and I have tried to parent my children as though I don’t have a job” For most women, the expectation to be a good mother as well as a successful woman is a major reason for the maternal paradox. More women, now than ever, are choosing their dreams, desires, and aspirations, over their roles as procreators and caregivers; they are now active agents in the nation building process. They no longer try to fit the gendered trope of being subservient and virtuous wives and ever-sacrificing mothers as they step out of their homes to participate in the workforce (Nandy & Banerjee 2017; Krishnaraj, 2010). Mothers on-screen, like their counterparts off-screen, are no longer restricted to their procreative roles; they are also active agents in the nation-building process (Krishnaraj, 1990). However, when women take-up roles other than their primary duties as wives and mothers, they are expected to fulfil their responsibilities at home so that they can participate in the world outside (Bagchi, 1990; Chatterjee, 1990). They are blamed or they feel guilty when they are not able to successfully balance their maternal responsibilities with their career opportunities, and this leads to the maternal paradox.

Historically, motherhood in India is infused in the cultural framework. Here the goddess mother, the nation mother, and the biological mother are put together in a complex matrix, thereby making much of women's sexuality a means to the reproduction of a male child who would in turn be a dutiful son protecting the nation mother. "Motherhood's actual contribution is to maintain patriarchy: the dominance of the male through the triple instruments of control over reproduction, sexuality and sexual division of labour" (Krishnaraj, 2010, p. xii). Contemporary constructions of motherhood ideology in India are evident in both glorification of an idealised maternal idea as well as the "deficit" attributed to the maternal body, reflecting deep-seated patriarchal biases whose roots are tracked in history (Bagchi, 2017). The paradox of motherhood in the context of feminist theorising in India was the potent contradiction between the ideological glorification of motherhood as *Shakti* (power) and the powerlessness faced by mothers in their everyday lived reality. Hence Indian feminist theorisations had to take on board the complex process of the ideological use of motherhood to keep the family as the regulating and regulated social order, thereby confining women to the reproductive domain of the "home" and denying them access to the "world". Although motherhood has been conceived as the culmination of the ideal womanhood, compliant towards family elders, it has also offered a pathway to break open the clutches of patriarchy, often using the trope of motherhood (Bhattacharya, 2006).

The chapter examines how working mothers, through an empowered mothering, can overcome their maternal paradox. Empowered mothers reconfigure the mothering practices that enable them to seek an identity beyond their role as mother. This alternative mothering practice that these mothers perform have been identified and classified during this chapter. Firstly, these mothers negotiate societal surveillance and

problematise the established notion of the good mother. Secondly, they practise a form of mothering which does not require 24/7 intensive involvement of the mother, and lets the mother develop her selfhood by pursuing a career or engaging in activities outside their mothering responsibilities. These mothers pursue paid employment to seek fulfilment of their selfhood and higher order needs. Finally, to pursue these activities, the mothers adopt alternative mothering practices which enable them to juggle their responsibilities at work and at home. For these women their maternal duties and professional commitment overlap as their work becomes home, and home becomes work. They assume a maternal position at work while practising professional aloofness at home. Using the theory of empowered mothering developed by Andrea O' Reilly, the chapter seeks to understand the emergence of the new-age working mothers in India as empowered mothers. For this purpose, four recent films have been selected- *Tumhari Sulu* (Triveni, 2017), *Shakuntala Devi* (Menon, 2020), *Tribhanga-Tedhi, Medhi, Crazy* (Shahane, 2021), and *Jalsa* (Triveni, 2022), and a thematic analysis of the mothering practices in these films has been conducted to examine the cultural discourses regarding working, new-age mothers, and their journey to become empowered mothers through reconfiguration of the hegemonic mothering practices. The chapter also reveals how Hindi Cinema by gradually recognising that working mothers is not a homogeneous category, has expanded the understanding of motherhood.

Working Mother's Paradox: The Desire to Have it All

First, from the early 1950s, many employed mothers began to challenge, although not overturn, the dominant discourse of the ideal mother as exclusively bound to the home. The simple fact that so many women were drawn to work outside the home despite criticism demonstrates the monetary and psychological importance of employment for women

Dolly Smith Wilson, *A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*, 2006.

Working mothers can be defined as-

a woman with the ability to combine a career with the added responsibility of raising a child. Within this broad term, two different categories of working women may be encompassed: the stay-at-home mother who works from home and the woman who works away from home while managing to fulfil her maternal duties. (Poduval & Poduval, 2009, p. 64).

The working mother as an institution is most often doubly marginalised; first, in the family, for compromising the needs of the child for her self-actualisation, and secondly, in her workplace where her skills and productivity are always put to doubt. Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo., in her interview with *The Atlantic*, recalls her mother's words to narrate a similar situation:

You might be president of PepsiCo. You might be on the board of directors. But when you enter this house, you're the wife, you're the daughter, you're the daughter-in-law, you're the mother. You're all of that. Nobody else can take that place. So, leave that damned crown in the garage.

A woman's success is determined by her ability or inability to become a good mother, as a mother is under constant surveillance of the people around her. The patriarchal order of motherhood has been so designed that women are constantly living under the fear of negative evaluation or, what critics have called, mother blaming (Ladd-Taylor, 2004; Miller, 2017; Rich, 1976). It is the fear of mother blaming that causes in her the guilt of aspiring for anything beyond her mothering duties. It is in this context that Anne-Marie Slaughter, former Director of Policy Planning for the U.S. State Department (2009-11) wrote a popular article, *Why Women Still Can't Have It All* in which she speaks of the many ways women face mother-blaming from the self and the society. She also speaks of her decision to step down as the Director of Policy Planning when she had to prioritise her maternal roles over her political ambitions and the reactions, she received from people around her. She speaks of several other women leaders including Hillary Clinton and Clinton's chief of staff Cheryl Mills and notes

how the society is not designed to encourage the growth of working mothers. Often these mothers get sidelined for their alleged inefficiency at work and are also blamed for compromising the needs of their children. Mother blaming is not an isolated affair in Indian society, this can be seen across the globe where working mothers are often castigated for their inability to adhere to the norms of the patriarchal ideology of motherhood. Interestingly, however, unlike elsewhere India and some indigenous communities have the tradition of co-mothering children. So, working mothers who live in a joint family or close-knit society can rely on their family or friends to care for the child. This not only reduces the burden on the mother, but also does not drain the parents financially. However, such practices have become almost redundant as the Indian society has shifted towards the model of nuclear families, making mothering in India a lonely and burdensome labour.

Working Mothers: The Real and the Reel

Several studies have been conducted keeping in mind the entry of women in the workforce and their changing role in society. Post 1990s, with liberalisation and privatisation of the economy, India has seen an influx of women in the workforce (Krishnaraj, 1990). With informalisation of the workforce, following the privatisation and liberalisation, more women participated in the economy of developing countries like India (Manimekalai, I. Sivakumar, & S. Geetha 2019, p. 169). Further, the advent of the IT industry has eased the participation of women in the job market. Over the years, a considerable number of women have joined entry and middle level management positions. (Bhattacharya & Ghosh 2012, 45). However, the nation-state tightened its clutches to defend the “traditional cultural politics.” (Bannerji, Mojab, & Whitehead, 2001, p. 9). Women’s participation in the workforce did not ensure their gender emancipation. The identity of the “new woman” was traditional as well as

modern. She was allowed to participate in the workforce only when she had fulfilled her traditional roles as a mother and a wife. Her being and body came to define the limits and boundaries of both cosmopolitanism and Indianness. She was required to embrace the modern outlook while keeping intact her traditional values (Oza, 2012, p. 31). As these women started participating in the workforce, they gained economic emancipation, which gave them the buying power. This economic emancipation caused alarm, and her buying power came to be associated with being avaricious, superficial, and she was equated to her dissolute and promiscuous western counterpart. That the economic emancipation allowed her to take care of not only her family but also herself, drew criticism from the society. As working mothers spent money on themselves, they were accused of ignoring their conjugal and maternal responsibilities. This conflict of traditional and modern outlook is an important aspect of the maternal paradox and it has been best captured in the portrayal of the new women in post 2000 Hindi Cinema. In these films “The dangers of Western cultural intrusion were symbolised by provocative attire, smoking, or drinking, and the resolution of this conflict was achieved when women recognised their imperative role as the mother and the nurturer” (Niranjana, 1991; Vasudevan, 1994; Mazumdar, 1996; Oza 2012, p. 31). Over the years, the conflict has been functional and has determined the representation of women on screen. However, in recent times the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, Indian/Western, spiritual/material, good/bad have conflated and we see women characters more grounded. In this context, it is interesting to chart the journey of working mothers who have overcome their maternal paradox to become empowered mothers.

According to the Catalyst Report (2020), women account for only 19.9 % of the total labour force in India. As of 2020, only 20.3% of women aged 15 and older, participate

in the workforce. Despite India's growing GDP and climbing working age population, there has been a minimal increase in the participation of women in the workforce. Although, the recent reports are largely affected by the stagnation in the job market, due to the pandemic, the cultural norms with respect to gender roles, gender wage gap, lack of safe and flexible work policies make it difficult for women to participate in the labour market. As more women started working because of Liberalisation, they felt the lack of spousal and family support, inadequate government policies to support mothers, and unavailability of childcare facilities (Chowdhury, 2011). The UNESCO Report of 1978, recognises the greater difficulty Indian women face as working mothers than an employed mother in Western countries. Even if she is working to uplift the economic status of their family, she must take care of her responsibilities as a mother and a wife, before taking care of her work commitments. As the working woman steps out of her home to participate in the workforce, she is very often blamed for side-lining her primary procreative and caregiving responsibilities and labelled a bad mother. Each woman varies in her ambitions, gender-role expectations, and the degree in which she receives spousal support, and researches have emphasised the impact of these factors on the relationship working women share with their family (Kulman & Paludi, 1986; Simpson & England, 1981; Locksley, 1980). The most important factors are the understanding and support of both the husband as well as the children. Husband's support involves a positive attitude towards the wife's employment, sharing childcare responsibilities, and participation in other household chores. However most men decide their marital satisfaction by comparing the inconvenience caused to them on account of the additional household responsibilities with respect to the increase in family income; hence, marital satisfaction is lesser in working women as compared to their non-working counterparts (Goudy & Lorenz, 1989). In the Indian context, Kapur's study of

1970 revealed the socio-psychological issues which blamed the working wife for complicating marital interaction and problems in adjustment with the family by causing a conflict between her multiple roles. Despite these challenges and strained personal relationships, they still choose to work because of their desire for self-actualisation and higher order needs. Further, for women who choose to work and to mother, maternal duties and professional commitment overlap as their work becomes home, and home becomes work. They assume a maternal position at work while practising professional aloofness at home, which again adds to their maternal paradox.

A study of the representation of working mothers in Hindi Cinema helps us formulate a broad understanding of working mothers off-screen (Kashyap & Tripathi, 2022). Over the years, many studies have discussed the close correspondence of Hindi Cinema with India's social and political history (Dasgupta, 1996; Nandy, 1998, 2008; Prasad, 1998; Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Dwyer, 2010). The chapter is based on Dwyer's understanding of Hindi Cinema as a “collective imagined text, as both art and culture and as part of the everyday world of ordinary people. The chapter treats Hindi Cinema and the cinematic texts as a reflection of India’s social imaginaries, from which we can intercept how India and its people sees itself in the present and how they imagine and reimagine their future and the past. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine Hindi Cinema’s depiction of the new woman. Although, we have been watching the new woman on screen for a long time, we do not always get to see this new woman juggling the many roles of a wife, a mother, and a corporate worker. Characters played by Sharmila Tagore, Parveen Babi and Zeenat Aman are precursors to the new woman. Ajay Gehlawat (2015) has discussed the shift caused by Zeenat Aman’s cosmopolitan presence on screen in Hindi Cinema. Sharmila Tagore in *An Evening In Paris* (Samanta, 1967), or Zeenat Aman in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (Anand, 1971), Parveen Babi in

Namak Halaal (Mehra, 1982) and Rekha's transformation in *Khoon Bhari Maang* (Roshan, 1988) are predecessors of the new woman. Madhuri Dixit and Sridevi are the true products of liberalisation. They have laid the path for today's new woman with their "distinct transgressive, unruly, and nonnormative femininities." (Anwer & Arora 2021, p. 9). Banerjee and Desai (2021) analyse how these new women when made their comebacks after becoming mothers themselves, they toned down their star image and donned the role of a middle-class mother, with the same self-assuredness but a little less sensuality. While in the 1980s Sridevi played glamorous roles in *Nagina* (Malhotra, 1986), *Mr. India* (Kapur, 1987), *Chandni* (Chopra, 1989), *Chaalbaaz* (Parashar, 1989), in 2012 we see her as a meek middle-class mother juggling her role as an entrepreneur, mother, and earning her self-respect by learning English. Similarly, Madhuri Dixit played some of the most experimental roles of her career in early 1990s- *Tezaab* (Chandra, 1988), *Saajan* (D'Souza, 1991), *Khal Nayak* (Ghai, 1993), *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (Barjatya, 1994) and she came back with *Aaja Nachle* (Mehta, 2007) still dancing to her own tunes. When these heroines shifted to the second half of their career, they took up roles which are equally experimental if not glamorous. It is also around this time that there has been emergence of the New Age Mothers on screen. While Sridevi is an entrepreneur in *English Vinglish* (Shinde, 2012) and a biology teacher in *Mom* (Udyawar, 2017), Madhuri takes up dance as her profession in *Aaja Nachle* besides being a mother.

From the latter half of 2000s, we gradually started witnessing working women on screen. In 2004 we see Preity Zinta playing the role of a TV journalist reporting war in *Lakshya* (Akhtar, 2004); her character is inspired by the real-life journalist Barkha Dutt, the only female reporter who covered the Kargil War. In *Salaam Namaste* (Anand, 2005) she again played the role of a progressive Indian girl living in Australia studying

to become a surgeon while working part time as a radio jockey. Here, we see her not only living with her boyfriend, but also embraces motherhood through unplanned pregnancy. Vidya Balan starts her career as a working woman in *Parineeta* (Sarkar, 2005), following which we see her as a radio jockey in *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Hirani, 2006). Finally, she appears as a gynaecologist and a single mother in *Paa* (Balki, 2009). Over the years, it has become a norm to see working women on screen as journalist, police officer played by Rani Mukherji in *No One Killed Jessica* (Gupta, 2011) and *Mardaani* (Sarkar, 2014); as architect, photographer and doctor played by Deepika Padukone in *Love Aaj Kal* (Ali, 2009), *Cocktail* (Adajania, 2012), and *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* (Mukerji, 2013) respectively. These women on screen sometimes choose to work and to mother. With the socio-economic changes, we notice the culturally dominant idea of the mother has also undergone a vast shift. With films like *Kahaani* (Ghosh, 2012), *English Vinglish* (Shinde, 2012), *Nil Battey Sannata* (Tiwari, 2015), *Kahaani 2* (Ghosh, 2016), *Mom, Maatr* (Sayed, 2017), *Badhai Ho* (Sharma, 2018), *Helicopter Eela* (Sarkar, 2018), *The Sky is Pink* (Bose, 2019), *Panga* (Tiwari, 2020), *Mimi* (Utekar, 2021), *Tribhanga* (Shahane, 2021) and many others we see different types of mothers, each unique in their own ways. Some are working, others learning a new language, or going to school, taking up entrepreneurship, some giving birth at the age of fifty, others giving birth while not being married, some adopting a child, others avenging the death of their child (Tripathi, 2023). These mothers are mostly new women, the products of liberalisation and globalisation. Their journey in the films revolve around their search for identity. Their economic emancipation has enabled them to choose the social roles they would play. Most importantly, it looks at motherhood not as a restricted experience, but one that is a part of life among other things. These films allow women to chase their dreams and venture into avenues beyond their comfort

zone, without letting their motherhood become a hurdle. Hindi Cinema's recent engagement with working mothers have received almost negligible scholarly attention. The chapter tries to address this gap in literature on the representation of working mothers in Hindi films. As more women started working outside their homes, they found cultural expression in Hindi films. Only gradually has a section of Hindi Cinema experimented with the character of the mother and depicted their trials, tribulations, dreams, aspirations, and their journey towards empowerment.

Working Mother and Empowered Mothering

As a woman chooses to work as well as mother, we get a glimpse of her in her independent capacity, without her responsibilities as a mother overwhelming her. The three steps towards performing empowered mothering as a working mother are: First, to absolve oneself of the guilt of being a bad mother and negotiating the social stigma; Second, to recognise one's needs and work towards self-actualisation; and third, to adopt alternative mothering strategies to ensure that they have an enriching experience at home as well as at work. A working mother pursues her self-actualisation process while also participating in caregiving.

Andrea O' Reilly proposes the concept of empowered mothering and feminist mothering in her book, *Feminist Mothering* (2008). Studying the contemporary trend in mothering and books on parenting practices, she observes that there is a tendency to overcome the guilt of motherhood, and move from child centredness to nourishing the individual. This new mothering strategy O' Reilly notes "advocates balance and admonishes guilt" (2008, p.1) It is from here that she develops the concept of empowered mothering and feminist mothering. In *Mother Outlaws* (2004), the concept of empowered mothering is explored, emphasising the mutual benefits when mothers

live their lives and engage in mothering with agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy. This approach to mothering rejects the notion that childcare duties should solely fall on the mother, as they often seek assistance from partners, friends, or family to collectively care for their children. Empowered mothering grants mothers the freedom to balance motherhood with paid work or other activities. This progressive form of mothering challenges the traditional patriarchal setup that demands full-time intensive mothering, which consumes excessive time, energy, and financial resources. Instead, empowered mothers practise non-intensive mothering, allowing them to break free from societal constraints and personal guilt associated with their roles as caregivers. They prioritise a life that goes beyond just being a mother and resist putting their children's needs above their own. As empowered working mothers, they do not look to motherhood to define and realise their identity. Their selfhood is fulfilled and expressed through various means: work, activism, friendship, relationship, hobbies, and motherhood. These allow them to seek self-actualisation, which is one of the higher order needs of every human being and is placed at the topmost level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Self-actualisation refers to the desire for self-fulfilment- to be what one can be, and must be. "This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1958, 20). Although by discussing the need for self-actualisation, Maslow discusses how one could want to be an ideal mother, and the need for self-actualisation is not limited to the creative urge; it very often takes up some form of self-expression.

However, for these mothers, work often becomes an enriching place where the employees feel recognised, empowered, and their higher-order needs, which includes the desire for self-actualisation and self-esteem, are fulfilled, and they become more attracted towards work than towards their complicated home life. Gradually, work and

family are not distinct sets of activities, but are rather competing emotional cultures. To cope with this challenge, most working mothers tailor mechanisms that best suit them and design mothering strategies and management techniques which best suit their lives at work and home. A.R. Hochschild in her book *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (1997) speaks of how distinctions between home and work life are being blurred in recent times. Although, the work in general is about working parents, she emphasises the position of working mothers in it. According to Hochschild, employees in America were spending longer hours at work because they wanted to, not because they had to. Although Hochschild's book is a case study of an American company named Amerco in the 1990s, yet she has studied a transformation under way- "The cultural world of paid work was growing stronger, while families and local communities- the social world with which we associate our deepest bonds of empathy-were growing weaker" (p. 10). Hochschild identifies a unique situation where the enriched environment at work has become home-like, while their lives at home increasingly took on aversive characteristics traditionally associated with work. Hochschild, through her case study, also points out the anomalies of a woman trying to adapt to a male model of work and trying to enjoy the privileges formerly reserved for men. In the process of doing so, she speaks of an employee Vicky who- "brought a maternal presence to the office, so she brought administrative skill to mothering" (p. 105). For several women, their maternal duties and professional commitment overlap as their work becomes home, and home becomes work. They assume a maternal position at work while practising professional aloofness at home. This overlapping is inevitable given that workplaces now are paying as much attention to the needs of the employees as to their customers. In the Indian context, given the high standards of motherhood expected of women, it is difficult for them to practise professional

aloofness at home. Instead, they take their maternal duties to work as well as practise a maternal attitude at work (Sandberg, 2013). This also brings to attention the lack of childcare support at workplaces. Women heavily depend on their husbands, parents, or paid caretakers to take care of their children. When these women return from their work, they switch from one shift of work to another, they take up the duties of cooking, cleaning, and parenting at home because not all could delegate these responsibilities to others. This switch from the exciting and enriched environment at work to the emotionally demanding home atmosphere, makes it a challenge for most women. So these mothers develop ingenious techniques to balance their work and home life, so that they can have an enriching experience as a worker as well as a mother. These working mothers consider motherhood as a site of power, through which mothers can affect social change, in home through the means of feminist childrearing and outside through maternal activism. The resistance towards patriarchal motherhood by empowered mothers is a personal act, and not a political one, it is not developed from a place of awareness of the cultural/ideological oppression of mothers. While O' Reilly focuses mostly on feminist mothers, this chapter builds on her concept of empowered mothers. She herself in her theory accepts that the word feminism is complicated and excludes the mothering experiences of women of colour, and is therefore understood by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks to be a white term for many black women. In the Indian context, the mothers we discuss do not identify as feminists, however, they too aim to challenge the hegemonic mandate of maternal selflessness and sacrifice. The desire for fulfilling their higher order needs by seeking support from others and making time for themselves stems from a feminist intention to dismantle the patriarchal institution of motherhood, so one cannot ignore their feminist consciousness.

Tumhari Sulu (2017)

When we see Vidya Balan as Sulu or Sulochona Dubey in *Tumhari Sulu* in the first scene she is seen wearing a saree and sneakers trying to balance a lemon on her spoon as she participates in a lemon and spoon race in her son's school on the Sports Day. Her husband Ashok played by Manav Kaul and her son Pranav are seen cheering her from a distance. She manages to secure the second position even after a late start. She however asks Ashok to click a photo of her posing with the medal as she stands in the first position on the ranking podium. This not only shows us her playful nature but also anticipates Sulu's inability to be the best mother in spite of her best intentions and efforts. Sulu starts off as a good mother, mothering her family while seeking little pleasures in small wins. She transgresses out of good mothering practice when she chooses a job that upsets her family life. As a night radio jockey, she has to stay out of home and is not able to cater to the needs of her husband and child in the morning. While Ashok tries to compensate for her, her job also starts affecting the relationship between them. Ashok's new boss further complicates his life and it adds to his insecurities building around Sulu's job. Their son, Pranav is suspended from his school for bringing his father's mobile phone to school and using it to show obscene videos to his classmates in exchange for money. He is also charged with forging his father's signature in his school diary. The family blames Sulu for the recent development in Pranav's life, without being aware that he has been indulging in these activities even before his mother took up the job. Pranav however runs away from home when he sees his mother being blamed on account of his deeds. He absolves her of all guilt and writes a letter to his father requesting him to not send him to his aunt's place and he also asks him to not blame his mother for failing to perform her duties. The sexualisation of her voice further creates a crisis in her claim to be a good mother. Although Sulu never

indulges in any form of sexual transgression, Pranav's mischief at school is attributed to the nature of her job. Sulu is blamed for being a bad mother by her family members, including her husband. Her son absolves her of the blame, but, when her identity as a mother faces a crisis, she decides to quit her job. She gets back to her job, only when she finds an alternative that would let her pursue her dreams without jeopardising her role as a mother.

Sulu comes from a middle-class family and is seen as the black sheep in her family who fails to shine before her near-perfect older twin sisters. Although Sulu wishes to work like her sisters or start a business of her own, she does not have the adequate resources to do so. She continues to participate in small competitions arranged by radio stations, community groups, and schools. It is in these small achievements that she finds a sense of accomplishment and gratification. When she goes to collect the prize for one of these contests in the radio station that she finds the job opening as a radio jockey, one that does not require much academic accomplishment but allows her to express her flamboyant personality. In *Tumhari Sulu*, it is the desire for self-actualisation that drives the plot of the film. Sulu's restlessness all throughout the film, her search for a new business plan everyday shows her desire for self-esteem and self-fulfilment. As much as she wants to support her family financially, she also seeks to find an identity beyond her role as a mother and wife. After her husband and son leave for their office and school respectively, she rarely has anything to do. She mostly dozes off to sleep listening to the radio. So, when she gets the opportunity to be a radio jockey, she seizes it. Although the creator of the show is sceptical about her intentions and capability, her employer Maria, a woman herself, is not. She is assured Sulu's drive for self-actualisation will motivate her to perform well, even without prior experience in the field. Armed with her presence of mind, and with an appetite to forge her identity,

beyond the four walls of her home, Sulu makes her show popular among her audience. She continues to work even when it starts taking a toll on her relationship with her husband. A woman with limited resources and no familial support always finds it difficult to continue working (Kulman & Paludi, 1986; Simpson & England, 1981; Locksley, 1980).

Sulu starts her journey as a full-time mother, and gradually she takes up a job that comes her way. So, when her identity as a mother faces a crisis, she decides to quit her job. She gets back to her job, only when she finds an alternative that would let her pursue her dreams without hampering her role as a mother. In her office she extends her motherly self and brings food for her colleagues and takes care of them. Joining her work, she soon understands the difficulty her colleagues face with respect to finding a decent tiffin-service for their lunch. This is the perfect opportunity for her, that lets her combine her role as a caregiver of her home, with the caregiver of the company. It is from this place of maternal concern that she starts a tiffin service which becomes a joint venture of her and Ashok. This also allows her to mend her relationship with Ashok, and allows him to find an alternative career. She makes her office her home, and quite literally makes her home her office by operating her tiffin services from home. Further, as she shells peas and cuts vegetables while she talks to her on-air callers, she continues to maintain this home-work parallelism. The maternal attitude of Sulu contributes in bringing the qualities of home and domesticity in her office. Therefore, when the producer of the night show tries to sexualise her voice and the show, she consistently tries to ground it in her everyday domesticity. At no point is there a threat of an actual sexual transgression. She is always conscious of keeping the conversations sanitised, keeping off the sexual potentials of the show. “She negotiates this world without giving up in essence what is seen as her stable, traditional family values, her Indianness” (Sen,

2021). Rather than making the show a late-night show verging on obscenity, she makes it about offering company to her lonely listeners each fighting their own battles in an urban cityscape. Thus, Sulu extends her maternal care to her listeners too.

Shakuntala Devi (2020)

Unlike Sulu, Shakuntala faces mother-blaming not from outsiders but from her own daughter, Anu. Devi herself indulges in mother-blaming of her mother and severs connection with her. The film, although a biopic, focuses more on the turmoil in Shakuntala Devi's personal life than her professional achievements. So, on more than one occasion we see Anu pointing out that a world-famous mathematician may not be a perfect mother. Throughout the film we see her seeking a normal mother-daughter relationship, a normal childhood, and normal conjugal life. Anu's normal motherhood is shaped by the societal standards of motherhood. However, her mother insists that if she can be an amazing mother, why would she settle for anything less. Having broken stereotypes all her life, she wishes Anu to do the same. She fails to realise that she is imposing on Anu her dreams and aspirations, as much as her parents had burdened her with their financial liabilities. Both the mother and daughter being caught in the maze of relationships fail to acknowledge each other as individual beings and continue the inter-generational conflict. While Shakuntala tries to be the Best Mother in the World, she never tries to understand what Anu needs and wants as a child. Anu too never realises the privileges that she enjoys being the child of a world-famous celebrity nor does she understand how her mother enabled her to break free of the clutches of the patriarchal society and created for her a comfortable cocoon that allowed her to think independently and formulate opinions about her mother. It was her privilege that allowed her to develop an identity separate from her mother's. For Shakuntala it was circumstances and her higher order thinking that allowed her to develop an identity

independent of her parents. However, both Shakuntala and her daughter Anu, realises at the end, although they wish to be different from their mothers, they have always carried a part of their mother within themselves. Unlike elsewhere, we see here the daughters engaging in mother-blaming and no other family members or outsiders are involved. Although Anu's mother blaming is rooted in ideologies of patriarchal motherhood and Good Mother-Bad Mother myth, it also involves Devi and Anu's struggle to separate from their respective mothers and daughters. It is only when Anu becomes a mother and steps into the professional world that she understands her mother fully. The inter-generational conflict continues until both Devi and her daughter are able to fully separate themselves from their respective mothers and daughters and see each other in individual light.

Shakuntala's mathematics skills are a chance discovery of her cousin, and it is from a very young age that she starts earning for her family. In mathematics and in her sister, she finds solace and company. Using mathematics as her tool she navigates up the social ladder. However, mathematics is not her profession, it is also her passion. This comes to light when Anu is born and she becomes a full-time mother, keeping aside her shows. She becomes exasperated, and gets back to work. However, she soon realises she wants to be with Anu, and continue her Maths shows as well. She takes Anu along with her round the globe, the only way she could have it all. However, this hampers Anu's mental well-being and she gradually becomes antagonised with her mother. To pacify Anu, she tries full-time mothering leaving behind her successful career, but the lack keeps haunting her. It is at these moments, that one realises how important it is for Shakuntala to be a good mother as well as maintain a successful career. Thus, when Anu expresses her desire to get married and settle separately, Shakuntala feels betrayed.

For Shakuntala self-actualisation comes to her through being a mother as well as being a world-famous mathematician, and she continues to be uncompromising about it.

Shakuntala is as experimental in her professional life, as she is with her mothering. She leaves home at a very young age, and as she performs around the world, she does not have anything or anyone to call home. Although she buys a house in London, the closest she was to having a home is when she settles down with Paritosh, her husband, in Kolkata. The birth of Anu, tugs at her motherly instinct and she tries the conventional ways of mothering. However, having taken the unconventional path always, she realises that she needs to do the same with her parenting style. She separates from Paritosh, and leaves with Anu and travels the world with her. To compensate for the lack of a home and paternal love, she showers Anu with the company of other celebrities and dignitaries. Shakuntala does not become a maternal figure at work, but she mothers her child at work. Most importantly, having shattered the gender prescribed roles she becomes an idol for other women around her. With her flamboyant personality, she makes it her life goal to never play by the rules. Like, her mathematics skills which defies human understanding, her parenting style too is not centred around the needs of her child, but something that combines her role as a mother and a world-famous mathematician. Shakuntala finds joy and actualisation in her motherhood, but her motherhood goes hand in hand with her work. Towards the end, Anu becomes a mother herself and she gradually understands the dilemma of being a mother and retaining one's individual self. She realises it is not possible to completely efface one's individual self after becoming a mother. Most importantly, she understands how Shakuntala finds self-fulfilment in her professional achievements. For Shakuntala work is always home; however, when Shakuntala is burdened with the expectations of motherhood her home becomes work.

Tribhanga: Tedhi, Medhi, Crazy (2021)

Tribhanga is the story of the conflict of three generations of mothers and daughters. Much like *Shakuntala Devi*, this film explores how daughters blame their mothers for having failed as a mother. Anuradha grows up watching her mother Nayanara pursue her passion of writing. Nayan becomes a famous novelist, and wins the Sahitya Akademi Award. However, her mother-in-law constantly blames her for ignoring her maternal and familial responsibilities. Soon after, Nayan leaves her marital home and moves out with her two children, Anu and Robindro and a house-help Vimal. The four of them start living as an unconventional family in a traditional society. The children are co-mothered by Vimal and Nayan; Nayan recalls that they had upset the traditional family setup of *Hum do, Humare do* (trans. We two, ours two) with their unconventional family of two mothers. Problem starts when Nayan decides to use her surname for her children, and goes to court seeking for the change. According to her, since she gave birth to the children and was responsible for nurturing and protecting them, the school or the society cannot coerce her into using the father's name for her children. However, this led to Anu and Robindro being bullied at school and being alienated by their friends and teachers. Nayan's decision to go to court was a revolutionary idea, which was also criticised by her social circle, but it was not easy for Anu or Robindro to cope with this kind of societal alienation, and they started blaming their mother. It was difficult for them to understand why their mother would want to do something so unconventional; they suffered together, silently. To make matters worse for Anu, Nayan found love again and decided to get married. Anu was an adolescent by then, and Vikram, Nayan's new husband began to sexually abuse Anu. Anu again suffered this silently becoming suicidal, and as her last means she even attempted to commit suicide. Anu felt her mother failed because her mother never understood her,

and the emotional trauma she was going through. Nayan came to know about the sexual abuse, much later when Anu revealed it in her celebrity interview. Anu felt betrayed by her mother, unlike other mothers who would unconditionally love their child and understand their unsaid problems; nor did her mother stand by her when she needed her the most. So, Anu decided to be an overprotective mother when she gave birth to Masha. She had separated from her abusive lover, Dmitri, during her pregnancy; they had a live-in relationship. Masha never met her father, but Anu fiercely protected her and stood up whenever necessary. She tried her best to be the mother that she felt, she never had. Despite her best efforts, much later in life, she comes to know from Masha, that even Masha was bullied at school. Although Anu never let any other man enter their house, she brought her boyfriends to Masha's parents-teacher meeting. Masha's teachers and her friends bullied her and alienated her, because of her mother's promiscuous life.

Nayan is self-aware that her fulfilment comes from a life of writing. It is a means of her actualisation, and she is ready to separate from her husband to pursue her aspirations. But for her, as a mother, her children were equally important, and she decided to take them along, in her journey of self-actualisation. To her, both her work and her children were of equal priority, and she never felt it was necessary for her to compromise between them. However, her feminist consciousness took charge of maternal instinct and she preferred to not interfere in the world of Anu and Robindro. She also did not restrict her desire for love and companionship, just because she was a mother. She found Bhaskar Raina, when Anu herself became a mother. Thus, for Nayan her gender, age, or her maternal role was never a hindrance for her journey towards self-actualization. Instead, she preferred to make the most out of whatever life experiences offered her. So, when she understood her children's anguish against her, she decided

that they should have their own narrative in her biography. She requested them, through her biographer, to participate in the writing of her biography. In the process, she accepts how she may have been able to mould the growth of her characters, but not that of her children. Anu discovers her love for Odissi, a form of Indian classical dance, much later in life. When Bhaskar Raina came into the life of Nayan, he also developed a close bond with Anu and Robindro. He also took them for shows and exhibitions, in one such classical show, Anu fell in love with Odissi, and Robindro found his spiritual calling. By then, Anu was already a mother; but her love for Odissi and desire for self-esteem and self-actualisation brought her fame and steady growth. It also helped her confront her childhood trauma and open about it. But for Anu, Masha was equally important, and she considered her maternal responsibilities also a part of her journey towards self-actualization. So, even if she always came with her boyfriends, she made it a point that she never missed any of Masha's parent-teacher meetings, and ensured that in no way Masha feels insecure or unprotected. To be a good protective mother for Masha was also an important goal for Anu. So, when Masha tells her that despite her best efforts, Masha was bullied at school for being an illegitimate child and her mother's promiscuity, Anu feels completely devastated. She feels she has completely failed as a mother, and she is not better than the mother she blamed all her life. It is at this epiphanic moment that Anu realises how her mother too, all her life tried to protect and nurture her, but some incidents were beyond her control. The experiences of her mother and grandmother negatively impacted Masha and she decided to settle down in a conventional, orthodox, joint family. Masha's need for self-esteem and harmonious relationships is fulfilled by becoming part of a conventional family, by earning legitimacy, and social sanction for herself and her child. Being gullible and prone to please her marital family, she even conducts a sex-determination test, to assure them

that she is about to give birth to a male child. Anu feels concerned and guilty that it is because of Masha's childhood insecurity that she may have chosen a family which pushes her to traditional gender roles and regressive practices, which both Anu and Nayan stood against. Although, Masha assures her otherwise, but in a way, Anu blames herself for Masha's decision which stems from her childhood insecurities and lack of conventional family setup.

In *Tribhanga* also the mothers adopt unique ways of their children to ensure that they can combine effective mothering along with successful careers. Like Shakuntala, Nayan practises a form of mothering which she thinks is best for her children and so does Anu. Unlike Shakuntala, Nayan however, believes in giving them space for them to grow and develop an independent consciousness. She does not try to interfere in their worlds much; and it is this uninvolved approach, which prevents Anu from confiding to her about her sexual abuse. Because of this unfortunate experience Anu decides to become overprotective about her child, Masha. Anu, having grown up in Nayan's individualistic familial setup, also develops an independent and spontaneous psyche, which often led to her rushing to make decisions which she regretted later in life. For both, Nayan and Anu their professional lives overlapped and interfered with their personal lives. Nayan's desire to build an independent consciousness in her children and to let them decide their life paths was a result of her feminist consciousness which stemmed from her life as an author. Her non-intensive mothering practice or her fight to give her own surname to her children were also part of this journey. From the mothers of her children to a maternal figure who protects and writes about the struggles of the marginalised women was how her work became a means to extend her maternal instinct to the work. Most importantly, the initial days when her mother-in-law blamed her for having failed in her marital and conjugal responsibilities then for Nayan her work

became home, and her home became work. Anu's work became her home when she finally found her passion in Odissi. She found solace in her dance rehearsals and in her love for Krishna. Dance became a means for her to communicate with the world and the divine.

Jalsa (2022)

Maya does not practise intensive mothering. Nor do we find Maya being overly concerned about the societal standards of good mothering practices. She has delegated her mothering responsibilities to her mother and Ruksana. However, as she watches Ayush through the surveillance camera, we can sense a guilt in her eyes as she tries to make up for her absence. Mother blaming and societal surveillance mechanisms are difficult to evade even for the most successful career women, as is evident from Nooyi's interview. Women are not evaluated according to their performance in the workplace, it is rather their mothering practices that allow them validation in society. Maya's position as the head of her news channel does not free her of her maternal responsibility. But her position and financial capability to delegate her duties. Ruksana, too, is never blamed for failing her responsibilities as a mother. Her job allows her to take care of her family, so it is part of her job. She is dependent on her neighbours and her spouse to mother the children. It is only when Aliaa, her daughter, meets with a fatal accident that she is washed with guilt and grief. Initially she blames herself for being absent from her children, and later she blames herself for accepting help from Maya. Both Maya and Ruksana are absent mothers. Although they seem to live in a world where they are not externally blamed for being bad mothers, they have themselves ingrained the guilt for being absent from their children. In *Jalsa* Ruksana works to support her family but Maya's commitment towards her work is more than that. Maya, having satisfied her basic needs, moves outside her home for self-fulfilment. As much as she

is the sole breadwinner of the family, she seeks greater purpose in her work. Her work as a journalist allows her the privilege to stand up for the truth. She has become the face of truth as we see posters of her spread in banners across the city. Interns join her company to get an opportunity to work with her and look at her as an idol. Maya at her workplace is a confident New Age Woman, who seems to have it all. Having delegated her mothering responsibilities to her mother and Ruksana, her schedule does not contain anything apart from her work. While Sulu finds a job to seek self-actualisation, Shakuntala Devi and Maya have satisfied their self-actualisation needs at their workplace. It is this gratification that makes them inseparable from their work. In Maslow's terms they have 'become everything that one is capable of becoming'. It is because of this that they rise above their ordinary existence and have become a source of inspiration for people around them, and command their respect. Self-actualisation being the highest need in the hierarchy, it represents reaching one's full potential. To reach their fullest potential Maya and Shakuntala both adopt alternative techniques of mothering. Shakuntala travels with her and emphasises on her overall development rather than conventional educational system. She is only forced to put Anu in a boarding school, when her husband threatens her with legal action. At a point, it seems she is unable to put Anu's needs before hers, like a good mother should. However, when Anu looks back at the memories of her childhood in photographs, she realises how unique and privileged upbringing she has had, because of her mother. Similarly, Maya depends on her mother and a nanny to care for Ayush, besides constantly monitoring him through camera. Ayush grows fonder of his nanny than with his mother. These mothering practices do not meet society's approved standards. However, it is suitable for the mothers who practise them. Both Shakuntala and Maya want to have it all, and do not want to make a choice between their children and their work. They question the

societal notion that a woman can either be a good mother or climb up the professional ladder. Women's path to self-actualisation is not easy, they have to contest the hegemonic practices in multiple manners, to attain self-fulfilment. Thus, self-actualisation among women is largely beyond their reach, and most women settle for much less. However, when they aim for higher, they need to adopt techniques of coping that are beyond the prescribed practices, in the process, their work becomes home, and home becomes work. Maya finds comfort in the professional world of her office cabin. With the minimalist modern décor, her coffee, liquor, and music Maya has created her cocoon where she stays late into the night editing videos and curating news. It is from this remote distance that she enjoys watching Ayush, doing his daily activities with his grandmother and nanny. Although there is an element of tension as she watches over Ayush in the surveillance camera or blames Ayush for making her life difficult. It is as if she knows that she has failed her responsibilities as the mother. We never hear the ugly words Maya uses to vent out her frustration and disgust, but it is apparent that they are not pleasant for any child to hear, let alone a child with special needs. Her job allowed her to fulfil her self-actualisation, self-esteem, and higher order needs. With her divorce and Ayush's health complications, her work became her home and her home had taken up aversive qualities commonly associated with work. Maya's anger is misplaced by the overwhelming guilt that sweeps over her after the accident. Her mother reveals Maya's anger issues are not new; she hides behind the façade of an angry mother to evade from the guilt of not being a good mother to Ayush. At office she has a rather motherly attitude towards the new intern, Rohini who wishes to work on Alia's case. It is because of this attitude and her sincerity towards her profession that she is not able to stop her from pursuing the news. When Maya finally decides to confess, she decides to do it in her office and before Rohini. Like a mother, she offers

Rohini the confession, which Rohini had been pursuing for days. Maya, indeed escapes to the safe haven of her work as many men have been escaping for generations, away from their homes. Having delegated the ancillary works like cooking, housekeeping, and parenting to paid help, Maya had curtailed the emotional aspect of home and now depended on technology to watch Ayush grow, from afar. As Maya calls to inform that she would return late, Ruksana is told to stay back and we see her life mirroring Maya's. She asks her neighbour to stay with her daughter, while her husband drops her son to Ruksana's workplace. Ruksana mothers Ayush, for income and yet she is seen to be more comfortable with Ayush than with her own children. She video calls Ayush to listen to him tell jokes even when she is stressed at the hospital. To her the accident reveals how less she knows about her children- their friends and their hobbies. Ruksana, too, like Maya, had completely immersed herself in her work life, and it is while mothering Ayush that we find her most home. Ruksana is so used to caring for Ayush that she does not forget to ask if he has been fed, even when her daughter is being transferred to a private hospital after suffering from a fatal accident. She cares for Ayush so much, that it almost feels like she loves him a little more than her own son. She has been absent from her children and she had never checked her daughter's videos on her social media channel. Alia, in her mother's absence not only had become a social media sensation, she had also befriended the local boys from the garage nearby who would take her out, late at night in her mother's absence. Her brother too had learnt to take advantage of the situation to get a chocolate or other favours from his sister. It is evident that while Maya has the privilege of watching her son grow up, as she works, Ruksana cannot afford to do so. Ruksana, although employed as a caregiver, never realises that she has been missing out on watching her children grow. It is only when Alia has been at the hospital that Ruksana realises how much her children have grown

up, but no one blames her for not being a good mother to her children, or for being an absent mother. It is common for women of her class to leave their children at home while going away to earn bread (Dillaway & Pare, 2008, pp. 456-457). They depend on their neighbours or their older children for mothering the younger ones. So, even when a friend from the slum comes to visit her, they question the liberty being given to Alia, but never blames Ruksana for being a bad mother. However, Ruksana herself is filled with guilt, grief, and other mixed emotions as she spends time with her daughter in the hospital. It becomes worse for her, when she realises it is Maya who had hit Alia. Both, Ruksana and Maya make their work their home, and their home a work and the mothering practices of Ruksana and Maya may seem to mirror each other, yet they lie at two different poles of the societal map.

From Maternal Paradox to Empowered Mothering

Sulochona, Shakuntala Devi, Nayantara, Anuradha, Maya, and Ruksana have markedly different life stories. The choices they make, and the circumstances created by these choices are also very different. But they have at some point in their lives chosen themselves over their roles as mothers; and they have also been blamed for their negligence and failure as mothers. This blaming has also contributed to these mothers feeling guilty about their choices and their desire to fulfil their higher order needs. To be stereotyped as a bad mother and especially to be misunderstood by one's own children contributes to a mother's lifelong sorrow and repent. Even if she manages to be successful in her professional field, this pain remains with her, and she only hopes against hope that she may have done things differently. But with limited resources, and very little help from the families, there is little chance that something different may have happened.

In an unexpected turn of event, Sulochana is able to make two of her dreams come true at the same time. Sulu not only continues to be a night radio jockey, but also starts her own tiffin service along with her husband. Cooking which was until now, a part of her domestic life, soon became a means of their livelihood. This also gives Ashok an opportunity to resign from an underpaid job which barely valued him. Their tiffin service became not only successful in Sulu's radio company, but they also started getting orders from elsewhere. Sulu also learns to drive a car as Ashok learns to take care of the household and their child. Their family finds a new routine for itself and each of them begin to adjust to their reconfigured roles. Ashok, indeed takes up the role of an equal parent for Pranav, as he finds more time to spend with him. This also allows Sulu to chase her dreams outside her home. That Sulu could become a successful radio jockey despite the demotivation and stigmatisation of her sisters and her father can be attributed to the administration at the company and her son and husband's support and cooperation. Sulu is an example of how working women can have it all when they have a conducive environment at home and at work; it does not then feel like that one has switched from one job to another.

Shakuntala's home never felt like work, and her parental family members depended on her, but never could burden her with responsibilities, she kept sending her mother money. But she never really resolved her issues with her mother, whom she blamed for being docile and passive towards her father's dominance and control. When she realised that she is the breadwinner of the family she started yielding control over her own life and did not allow any form of interference from her family or lovers. She believes in being in control of her life, and the only time she learns to let go of her control is when she becomes a mother. But her unresolved issues with her mother negatively impacts her relationship with her daughter. She believed for most of her adulthood that her

mother could not protect her children from their atrocious father, she became extremely possessive and protective of her child. It is her inability to separate herself from her mother that pushed Shakuntala into becoming a possessive and stubborn mother. Whenever a daughter is unable to separate herself from her mother then, “she can expect to live in “chains” unable even to think her own thoughts” (Adams, 1995, p. 414).

This inability to separate themselves from their mother is seen in Shakuntala-Amrita as well as Nayantara-Anuradha-Masha; when they can do so, they become empowered mothers. A mother’s relationship with her daughter is one of the most complicated ones, and it is a transitional one; it also determines the daughter’s relationship with her own daughter. The relationship changes over the years during the daughter’s adolescent period, her marriage and motherhood, and finally during the mother’s old age and infirmity. They bring a sudden “major change in state” for not just the mother and daughter as individuals, but also in their affective relationalities (Parkes, 1971, pp.101-115). Mothers and daughters are often considered as intimate partners who witness each other growing up and growing old, sharing information, experience, and insights about marriage, child rearing, and caring for families. This intimacy has been attributed to their inability to view themselves as separate individuals (Chavis, 1987). Thus, the desire to separate and attain autonomy and the desire to be intimate with the mother remains an important aspect of mother-daughter relationship (Flax, 1978; Lerner, 1985). Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and elsewhere have discussed the female’s lifelong struggle of separating herself from the mother and forging one’s autonomous identity. Women oscillate between “hostile separation undone by ongoing fusion.” Both Chodorow and Irigaray, though theoretically different, have asserted the daughter’s struggle for independence from their mothers. Following Chodorow’s line of arguments, children of both sexes begin life as

matrisexual (1978, p. 95), i.e., erotically loving the mother, who happens to be the caregiver. By the age of three, children reach the stage of individuation, where they can separate their bodily boundary and feelings from others. However, mothers continue to unconsciously identify with their same-sex child and project their interests, desires, beliefs, and feelings onto them. The mother-daughter relationship impacts the daughter's feelings about her "body, self-esteem regulation, career choices, and relationships to men" and to other women (Fenchel, 1998, p. xvi). Daughters try to turn to their fathers/men to separate themselves from the mother and to achieve freedom. This in turn puts them in an emotional triangle, where sexual/genital love for their father/men and their identificatory love for their mother/women (Chodorow, 1978, p.127). On not being able to fulfil their need of love through men, women want children which gives them a place for their deep, intimate, and identificatory love and intimacy (Chodorow, 1978, pp. 201-204). Thus, Shakuntala-Amrita and Nayantara-Anuradha-Masha are suspended in their life-long conflicts because of their inability to separate from their mothers. Their love-hate relationships also determine the kind of relationship they have with their partners and their children, especially if it is a daughter. Anuradha's relationship with an abusive man or her constantly changing boyfriends could be on account of her inability to separate herself from her mother. Similarly, Masha's desire to be accepted and legitimised by an orthodox, traditional, joint family is also because of her fear that her children might be mistreated just the way she was. It is also important to acknowledge that Shakuntala, Nayantara, Anuradha and Maya are also single working mothers. After separating from their husbands, they received little to no support. Although Shakuntala received help from Paritosh as he offered to co-parent her, Shakuntala could never share the responsibility and love of her daughter with him; she is also never seen employing a nurse or a nanny to bring up Amrita. Only when

Paritosh forces her, that she reluctantly sends Amrita to a boarding school for her formal education. Again, Maya's ex-husband comes to meet their son on alternative weekends, which is more of a ceremonial meeting. Maya too fiercely protects Ayush from his father or others. On the other hand, Nayan and Anu single-handedly bring up their children. Both are helped by their house-help Vimal, who co-mothers with Nayan as well as with Anu. For these single mothers, their work is no longer just a means of fulfilling their higher order needs but it also provides them with their livelihood. Co-mothering with a help or other family members is also a necessity. Most importantly, besides fulfilling their desire for self-actualisation it is also important for these women to overcome their intergenerational conflicts and nurture their unhealed self while they continue with their motherwork. This act of taking care of the self and to direct their care internally, while also nurturing their children, is also an empowering act which these mothers practise. This makes these women stand out from their predecessors who had little to no space for character development in the plot of the film.

In her interview with Anupama Chopra (2022) prior to the release of *Jalsa* when asked about what kind of changes she would like to see in the future in the industry, she answers how since 2015 she has been spoken about the need to deglorify the mothers in Hindi Cinema. She also adds, this process has already started. She has portrayed mothers of all types in their most humane form, with all their flaws, eccentricities, and idiosyncrasies. In a previous interview too, she had observed-

I think films are finally humanising women. They are not being made into holier-than-thou images or being portrayed as Goddesses to be put on a pedestal. It's just that it's only now that filmmakers are showcasing the other shades of women and not labelling them vamps just because they are assertive of their desires or not afraid to flaunt their sexuality (as cited in Chatterjee,2014, p. 29)

Vidya Balan played a significant part in diversifying the scope available for mothers on screen by experimenting with her choice of scripts. She plays a single mother in *Paa*, pregnant mother in *Kahaani*, *Hamari Adhuri Kahani* (Suri, 2015), and *Kahaani 2*, happy mother in *Tumhari Sulu* and *Mission Mangal* (Shakti, 2019), separated mother in *Shakuntala Devi*, *Jalsa*, abused mother in *Natkhat* (Vyas, 2020), and sometimes not choosing to be a mother while harbouring maternal warmth as in *Sherni* (Masurkar, 2021). It is for this purpose we study three of her films- *Tumhari Sulu*, *Shakuntala Devi*, and *Jalsa* to understand the traits of the new age mothers on screen. In recent times, most of the characters Balan has played are maternal women. To opt for maternal roles in a film industry which has always assigned glamorous, non-maternal roles to its female leads is a very recent phenomenon. However, Balan has not only retained her position as a female lead, with these experimental roles she continues to be popular among audiences and film critics alike. In the same interview with Chopra (2022), she quickly points out how in *Shakuntala Devi* she has managed to deglorify the mother and portray her as a woman with her own dreams and aspirations which goes beyond just being a mother. She fails to be what Hindi Cinema considers to be a good mother. Vidya Balan also confessed that she initially was reluctant to play Maya, because she could not like her (Chopra, 2022). Maya is not anything like the good mothers we are used to seeing on screen, she accuses her disabled son for making her life difficult. Maya's character inhabits a grey space and keeps brooding over several moral dilemmas which may be personal but are also universal. However, when we see it from the mother's perspective we realise, she did what she had to, and someone who was not in her situation cannot not accuse her for being right or wrong.

Thus, we can see the understanding of a Good Mother has been changing over time, and is also dynamic in different socio-economic class, religion, and caste of society.

The categorisation of working mothers as good/bad mothers depend on her ability to discharge her motherly duties according to the societal standards of motherhood and then fulfil her professional commitment. Working mothers to balance both the duties heavily depend on their spouses, relatives, and paid help to care for their children. This very often takes a toll on their relationship with their spouses and children, as is seen in all the four films. However, their accomplishment at work seems to make up for their need for self-actualisation. The strained personal relationship with the husband draws attention towards the need to balance the burden of care responsibilities at home. It also highlights the need for childcare facilities at work and implementation of government policies to support mothers. Most importantly, to encourage more women to participate in the workforce they need to be given equal pay and flexible work policies. Given an opportunity, women in today's times would like to perform equally well outside the confines of the home. Motherhood at no point should be made to feel like a burden of responsibilities through societal mechanisms like mother blaming. Motherhood and mothering practices is a matter of choice, but a choice which is still not available to most women. To make the mothering experience more enjoyable for both the mother and child, it is important that society enables mothers to achieve their higher order needs and not restrict her in her gender roles. As more and more Indian women leave their homes to seek jobs outside, it is important that the channels of culture popularise the many different stories of working mothers. So, mothers can be guilt free as they leave their homes and seek self-actualisation and explore their individual desires that give them joy and recognition and not limit themselves to their strict gender roles.

