

แนวคิด FEMINIST

รายวิชาการวิเคราะห์วิจารณ์ภาพยนตร์



## Feminist film unbanned in India, showing in Paris

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Poster for Hindi film 'Lipstick Under My Burkha' directed by Alankrita Shrivastava which opened the FFAST South Asia Film Festival in Paris, October 2017 Lipstick under my Burkha film poster

**In this week's look at Asia, we hear about a film which had its release delayed in India for six months by the censorship board. It's called *Lipstick Under My Burkha* and it screened in Paris this month at the South Asian Film Festival. Rosslyn Hyams has been talking to the film's director.**

*Lipstick Under My Burkha* is a feminist film of the most watchable kind. Director Alankrita Shrivastava says "the title is a metaphor for women's hidden desires, hidden dreams".

Her Hindi-language film shot in Bhopal opened the fifth South Asian Film Festival in Paris in October.

It had previously been shown in France at the Créteil Womens' Film Festival. She struggled for more than six months before getting approval for release in India after a screening at the Bombay Festival in November 2016. "They said it was too much from the female perspective," she explains. "It may have threatened the patriarchal norm. But India is still a functioning democracy. So we were able to have the ban lifted."

Related issues were raised by one or two people in a question and answer session after the film, with one person asking why there were no positive male roles in the film, for example. In fact, none of the characters are black-and-white in *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, and that's just what sets it apart.

### **It stars four women.**

-Rathna Pathak as the yearning widow, Usha, stands up for all the residents of the community where she lives but incurs their wrath when she hurts the pride of a local stud.

-Konkona Sen Sharma, a mother of three subjected to marital rape by her cheating husband, cheats on him by hiding her fabulous career as a sales rep.

-Ahana Kumra plays Leela, a female college student whose traditional Muslim father has nonetheless saved to enable her to go to a college where she mixes freely with young men.

-Plabita Borthakur is a sex-hungry beautician infatuated with a wedding photographer with an appetite to match hers but whose mother has her own reasons for wanting to arrange a marriage with a romantic man who naively believes his wife would be happier at home.

### **Set in Bhopal**

-The film is set in Bhopal. The character Usha was made a widow by the Union Carbide chemical plant disaster of 1984.

-However, Shrivastava set the film in Bhopal because of its social make-up, "I wanted many elements of Bhopal, like the old city being a separate geographical area and a new city coming up. I wanted an old city where Hindus and Muslims still live in close proximity."

-The South Asian Film Festival in Paris or FFAST as it's known for short, has been going for five years. The independent films it shows from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka tend, in general, to push the boundaries of accepted norms one way or another.

-Floriane Zaslavsky, one of the three FFAST programmers notes that four out of the six films in competition, including Hindi film *Hotel Salvation* which was first seen in France at the Festival of Asian Cinema (Fica) in Vesoul in February 2017 and Sri Lankan Tamil film *Demons in Paradise*, which screened out of competition at Cannes in May, are films that had trouble obtaining authorisation for public viewing.

-As the FFAST festival's focus on Tamil films from south-east India and Sri Lanka show, independent cinema from the region is inescapably political.

## FEMINIST FILM THEORY

[HTTPS://WOMENSFILMCOLLECTIVE.COM/FEMINIST-FILM-THEORY/](https://womensfilmcollective.com/feminist-film-theory/)

Film Theory is an academic discipline that aims to explore cinema through its relation to its connection to society at large; understanding films relationship to reality, art, individual viewers and society at large. Feminist Film Theory is a theoretical film criticism derived from Feminist Theory that was brought about during the second wave of feminism and largely developed by the introduction to Women's Studies in 1960 and 1970. In the 1970s, the women's movement aimed to increase the presence and agency of women, whilst film studies recognized the value of visibility and popular culture within what is essentially a political project. More recently, scholars have expanded their work to include analysis of television and digital media.

Feminist film is largely associated with critical theory, taking an avant-garde approach to filmmaking.



### Key Concepts:

The gaze and the female spectator- **“Male Gaze”**– the “male gaze” which makes up the majority of classical Hollywood filmmaking, argues that women in cinema are typically depicted in passive roles that provide visual pleasure (scopophilia).

Today we might consider the sexualized nature of women we see in films today. The male gaze suggests that women's role is exhibitionist- she is there to be looked at- to bear meaning, but not to make meaning. Women are to be looked at, but not identified with.

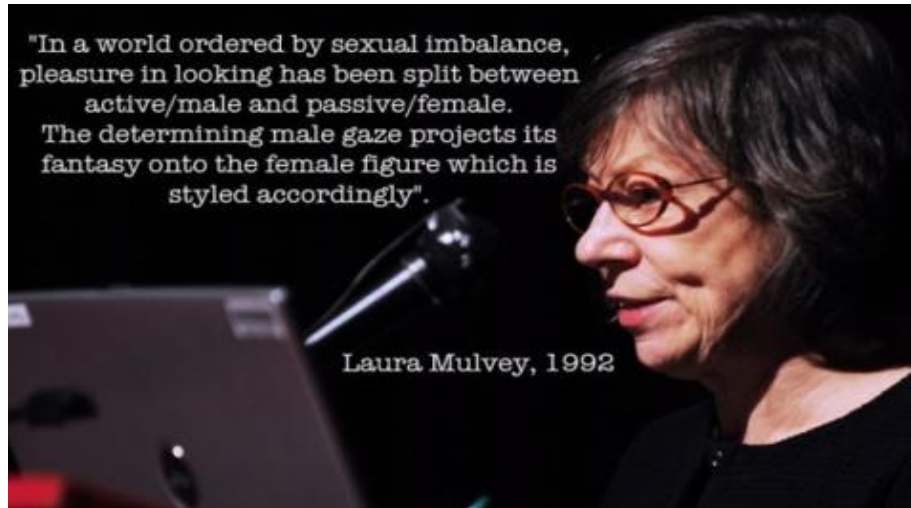
**Voyeurism** is the pleasure of looking and plays a huge part in the sexual objectification of women in film. It's the third person in the room- the audience who is capable and meant to identify with the male character, and in viewing the female is able to have her for their own viewing pleasure.

Famous feminist film theorist, Laura Murvey argued for the eradication of female sexual objectivity- that in order for women to be equally represented in the workplace, women must be portrayed as men are: lacking sexual objectification. Feminist film theory really advanced during the second wave of feminism at a time when there was great focus on women's entrance into the workforce. Let's be clear, getting rid of sexual objectivity does not mean censorship around sexuality, it means that the power dynamics are equal. It means that women have acting speaking parts that are of influence to the plot development, not just serving as a catalyst to progress the "manliness" and control of the male protagonist with lines in the form of questions directed at the male character. It means that audience members are capable of identifying themselves with that character, not just look at her. It means seeing women as funny, intelligent and complex as the ones we know in real life.

Laura Murvey spoke of this cultural impact and real life consequences to the gender gap for women in reference to film in relation to being taken seriously and treated as equal when attempting to enter into the workforce, but there are countless other ways that film and media influence and reproduce negative effects of sexism that we can point to today. We have come a long way (white women) from the kind of experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace, the kind of prevalent sexual harassment that took place during these times is most recently reenacted in today's hit t.v. series, Mad Men. Whether or not this television show has chosen to condemn the sexual harassment of women in that time, or depict it as some kind of a lament to the glory days could be a feminist film theorists argument on it's own and for another time.

Because men continue to dominate areas of film and television, both in the writing rooms and in production or directorial positions, we run into issues of men writing for women- speaking for women- creating characters based on their limited understanding of women- creating films and roles for women in these films that limit their power and the ability of the viewers to identify with certain characters ( female, a person of colour, disabled..). Sexual objectification can be seen by analyzing the passive roles given to women throughout the narrative of the story. It is a failure to portray truthfully the fullness of the lives, perspectives and humanity of women. This can have effects socially and individually. One woman delivered a TED talk on porn ( Yes, Feminist film theorists even lend their criticism to examining pornography and screen based forms of erotica).

She describes the experience as women are often unable to orgasm, to own their sexuality, to think of themselves as the actors in a sexual experience rather than the object sex is acted upon. She talks about the struggle inside her mind to stay in her body, in a first person account rather than thinking of what she looks like during the act of sex. An experience which, as women, I think most of us can relate.



Feminist Film Theory also concerns itself with identity – how we create identity- particularly around gender. An example of this juxtaposition lies in the kind of passive roles assigned to women that are meant to expose or solidify the opposite “masculinity” which the male character or heteronormative character portrays. In modern film structure, males dominance or “maleness” is defined in contrast to the passive feminine role. A man’s dominance is cemented through the child like and passive roles created for women, for which men can derive satisfaction and superiority next to their “softer” female counterparts. Women are there to be objects to be viewed, whose lines, though few, are often in the form of questions allowing the male to maintain the active role in the film, the character that is identified with.

Feminist Film Theory also looks at how domestic violence is portrayed on screen or how it is left out, but generally, how women’s issues such as rape and domestic violence are conveyed through film. A recent outburst was created around the television series Game of Thrones for it’s graphic rape scene of a minor which was not in the book the film was based off- a director’s choice.

Lastly, and very importantly, Feminist Film Theory must involve itself in intersectionality. It examines how women of colour are portrayed next to their white female counterparts as well. Or begs the question- where

are the shows that have a woman with a disability as the protagonist? Feminist Film Theory also might look at how women of a particular colour or body type are cast and in which kinds of roles? An example of this is the lack of love interests depicted in hollywood films by females who are not thin, white and conventionally “good looking,” or how women of colour are limited to type casted roles which convey racist stereotypes. An amazing feminist author who does this kind of work today, particularly as it pertains to women of colour is non other than bell hooks.